









# A talent to perform

Gerald Mangan

ANDRO LINKLATER  
Compton Mackenzie: A life  
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was only prevented by death from burning all—but among the family papers in an attic of William James's house in Irving Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Edel grows lyrical about the value of the survival, and for a reason in itself odd. "The visits to the dentist, the summons to the doctors, the long walks, the illnesses; and names of odd persons who were being touched in this way by genius, given a moment of posthumousness in a pocket diary!" Hagiography surely goes too far in seeing the highest function here of the Master's pen as blessing with a mention the "ordinary people" he meets. The tendency of the editors to appear as devoted nurses of James at his most infirm, fond custodians of his trivia, rather than—as Murdoch and Matthiessen were—seekers into his method and process at its most sublime, is emphasized by the general tone of the introduction. "At last I was peering into James's old workshops of the novel—the great desk or table by the west window, high above the flushed London sunsets at 34 De Vere Gardens, or the tranquil Garden Room of Lamb House, filled with the songs of birds and the hum of insects in the little brown port of Rye." This is James as the television cameras may soon begin to see him. And yet it is true that the balance of these complete *Notebooks* has itself something fully and touchingly human about it, bringing the genius who consorted with an angel together with the corpulent person in late middle age who sat down to breakfast.

The editing of the old *Notebooks* has been pursued by the new editors along different lines. The old print and format were easier to read. Murdoch and Matthiessen gave in their own words, and in italics, the subsequent history of a Jamesian *domide*, and the changes made when it became a finished tale. Edel and Lyall H. Powers favour a more austere technique of footnoting, without any general commentary on the fate of an idea. To take an instance of the difference involved, an entry for June 15, 1901, refers to something suggested to James by one of his friend W. D. Howells's stories, "A Circle in the Water". The new editors give to a footnote the publishing history of this story, while the old edition said nothing. James never followed through this particular idea, but he connected it with another, which he called the "E. Deacon" or "E. P. D. Subject", first referred to in 1893. Here again the new edition scores heavily, for it prints as a detached piece after the conclusion of the *Notebooks* the Houghton manuscript in which James actually began his story on the "E. P. D. Subject". In general, therefore, the new edition has the better apparatus for scholars, while the old one is more helpful for students and amateurs of James's literary method. Ideally we should have both.

The two pages of story which James began in 1893 on "the E. P. D. Subject" seem extremely promising, with the immediate clarity and mastery of implication found in his very best tales. Why then did he discontinue the tale of Mrs Vanneck, a lively young wife with a distinguished father and a dull young muff of a rich husband, who "puts pictures out of the illustrated papers and pastes them in books"? The editors make no comment, but I wonder whether James may not have been aware of the situation's resemblance to that of Ada Leverton, "the Sphinx", the clever young woman who was to give her own account of her marital problems in her satirical trilogy, *The Little Oracles*. Mrs Vanneck, who has already had a novel published, is much more "observed" than are most of the women in James's stories. She has the disconcerting gift of a "pretty stare", and is "never so lovely as in crossing the line that separated candour from reticence". Moreover she was as young to be so clever, and so unhelped to be so cultivated. With each touch of James's descriptive art she sounds more like a real person, and the art itself here is more daring, more broadly simple in its comic outlines, than is usual in his middle-to-late style. The fragment consists of a dialogue between the lady and an admirer ("He was not thought the stupidest of the young men, and he was not thought the handsomest; but this didn't prevent his being both very simple-minded and very good looking") and the peculiarly Jamesian drollery it catches is that of a clever frustrated woman reduced to treating as shrewd and sympathetic a young man nearly

as stupid as her husband, in order at least to have the relief of confiding in him. The "deep vagueness" of the young admirer ("His father was a bewildered country-gentleman, his mother was the daughter of a tarnished peer") is inimitably caught, and the fragment could even be said to suggest a bold departure towards incisive, directly observed social comedy, which James presumably then drew back from.

The same freshness is sadly lacking in the dictated notes for *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past*, which date from round about 1914 and are included at the end of the volume. James had been through much by then, and was far from well. His talking aloud about the two novels which he never finished, and perhaps knew were not worth finishing, is voluminous without substance, a vague daydream rather than a colloquy. The secret of his ability never to bore us, even in his latest period, is that he is never self-indulgent; but he does begin to be boring, in his own way, in his idea for *The Sense of the Past*. Rather touchingly James sees himself, as his hero, in the past, in the history to which old people belong, and which is kinder to them than the present. In the conception of his hero, Ralph Pendrel, he goes back to an America which was in a sense an ideal country of the mind, a country which had little attraction for him when he was young, but which at least had no contact with the "livid vulgarity" of the present.

The real joy of the *Notebooks*, though, is to be found already in the 1947 edition, and the excitement of recapturing there James's own excitement in the chase, the tip of the tail to be caught before it whisked away. The contrast that has come to seem more striking is between the little anecdote that he picks up, and the gradual dramatization of it that takes place in self-colloquy ("Oh, divine old joy of the 'Scenario!'" until it has moved entirely into a world of form and finish. Drama for James, while embracing and validating the arts of the theatre, came to have no other connection with that place of ill-omen:

It isn't at all the contact with the theatre—still as ever, strangely odious: it's the contact with the DRAMA, with the divine little difficult, artifice, ingenious, architectural FORM that makes old pulses throb and old tears rise again. Ah, the anecdote! Ah, the short story! It's very much the same trick!

To the very bottom of James's process, in his later art, goes the close acquaintance with the *Comédie Française* mentioned in the first of the American journals, the art of the event projected ingeniously into impossibility, and thus into the true aesthetic revelation. No wonder Virginia Woolf spoke anxiously of "the great, whisking of silk handkerchiefs" that attends a Jamesian dénouement.

Yet in the notebook process something like the opposite can also be true. The marvellous account—very early on—of how *The Portrait of a Lady* must be worked out, is in a sense truer, more perceptive, more gripping than anything the novel itself could bring to fulfilment. Frequently the *Notebooks* fascinate us with an idea teased out into a situation too perfect even to complete as a tale, like the one developed from old Mrs Proctor's confiding to James that after "a long life of many troubles, sufferings, encumbrances and devastations", the real luxury was the sense that nothing could now happen, that she could just sit and read a book. James worked this up into a scenario in which an old girl should be in this happy state, his wife having left him, but then she returns repentant and longing for the same peace and calm, which of course destroys his. "I note this, I see it all, I feel for him. At last, abruptly, he disappears, leaving the wife in possession—given up to the same happy stillness as he was. It's such a luxury to just sit and read a book." It's the same book—one I have seen him read. "The story was never written—perhaps in some obscure way it was too near the knuckle—but the seeing and the hearing involved in it are like one that very much was. Jonathan Sturges, staying with James, had reported W. D. Howells's words: 'Live all you can! It's a mistake not to.' His *Notebooks* show the ways by which James avoided that mistake. 'I can see him—I can hear him. Immediately, of course—as everything, thank God, does—it suggests a little situation'—one that James first thought of calling *Old Fellows*. Perhaps *The Ambassadors* was the better title.

During the First World War, when Compton Mackenzie's reputation as a serious novelist was at its height, very few of his admirers would have believed that his posthumous fame would rest largely on a pot-boiler written in his sixties. *Whisky Galore* (1947) and other Highland farces have now effectively eclipsed the greater part of his gargantuan output, both serious and comic; but it may well be their continuing popularity that has ensured the renewed editions of his sombre early *Sinister Street* (1914). It was that immense Bildungsroman that inspired Henry James to welcome him as "by far the greatest talent of the new generation", and later exerted an acknowledged influence on the young Scott Fitzgerald.

From those high judgment-seats, the young Oxford dandy who dazzled Edwardian London would now have to be considered, by and large, as a spectacular disappointment. "A perfectionist who took a wrong turning" was Raymond Mortimer's view of him; but his rise and fall as a novelist, to the point where he frankly deprecated himself as a mere "entertainer", makes an absorbing story that encourages a more equivocal verdict. In the course of a prodigiously varied career as actor, poet, playwright, preacher, spy, politician, land owner and media-celebrity, his flamboyant and protean personality took more than one questionable turning; and despite the reams of self-description he left behind, he has clearly bequeathed some rich enigmas to his biographer.

Besides the hundred-odd publications listed in an appendix, including fourteen volumes of memoirs and much autobiographical fiction, Andro Linklater has drawn on a large archive of personal documents, two unfinished studies and several living memories to assemble this first full biography; but it has plainly not been a simple task to identify the man behind the many masks. His own boyhood acquaintance with his subject, as a close friend of his father Eric Linklater, has given him an advantage of sorts, but his approach is visibly influenced by the memory of his personal charm. The result is a meticulous but often over-fond portrait of a figure whose real masterpiece he judges to be "the quotable, extravagant performance of his life".

Although he could change roles with the ease of a chameleon, Mackenzie's real origins were not altogether at odds with his most enduring incarnation as a self-made laird, and creator of stage-Scotsmen. His Highland blood was seriously diluted by some five generations in London, but it was in his veins somewhere; and the Victorian stage was the first world he knew. His Anglo-American mother, Virginia Bateman, was the leading lady in the touring company founded by his father, Edward Compton, whose stage-name he inherited along with the ancestral surname; and his birth in West Hartlepool in 1883 was an off-stage event in the midst of a crowded touring-schedule, which made his earliest infancy nomadic.

Severed abruptly from his adored mother, who left him behind in their gloomy London house to continue touring, he fell under the draconian rule of a bibulous nanny; and this chapter was later painted, in the darkest shades, as a purgatory which only the rare visits of his parents could relieve. *Sinister Street* gives the fullest version of himself as a lonely and terrified child, racked by nightmares in a fog-bound house; but this comparatively brief period seems to have left permanent marks, and miserable childhoods became a predictable feature of later novels. He learned a form of self-discipline that enabled him to deny his deepest fears and longings at will; and he remained abnormally dependent, well into middle age, on the approval of his mother. Despite her own inherited faith in the benefits of suffering, which led her to sanction the nanny's régime, he seems never to have identified her as the real source of his misery.

In the definition applied by Cyril Connolly to the typical fictional hero of Mackenzie's generation, the years at public school revealed him, by contrast, as a "born success". His only

schoolboy passion was platonic, it would seem, and his virginity was surrendered to the family cook, in a fashion normal enough for the time; but among his growing pains, much is made of a latent streak of sadism, which came to represent all the pleasures of conscious evil. Nothing seems to have occurred outside his brooding imagination, which linked it to the experience of early chastisement, but the fear of it precipitated a crisis that determined his whole future outlook. By his own account, it turned a haunted youth into a lifelong contriver "temperamentally incapable of dwelling on unhappiness".

Considering the effects of this remarkable conversion ("Never again did he give way to introspection and self-criticism"), very little light is shed on the crisis by either Mackenzie's or Linklater's account—which tells us of a haselless charge of seducing younger boys, an angry self-defence, a feigned breakdown and a rest cure in France. If this is what dispelled the shades of sin, the evocation of which makes *Sinister Street* almost unique among his novels for a certain depth of spiritual vision, the record is missing a page; and the lacuna is not insignificant. Did he suffer so deeply that he resolved never to dig under the surface again? In later years, he seems to have been offering an explanation when he applied a friend's definition of saintliness to himself: "To be capable of any evil, but to choose the good". The question should probably be considered in the light of his flair for self-dramatization, and his dogmatic optimism ("I sympathise with the sun-dial's preference for sunny hours"); but whatever the truth, it is a version that allows the rest of the story to be told as a continuous performance, largely uninhibited by analysis.

When he later cloined to view his education as a "handicap", Mackenzie—a natural and eternal philanderer—seems to have had his restrictive sexual codes in mind. He deliberately curtailed this propensity of the age of twenty-two, by his marriage to Frith Stone, but he would have done well to question Oxford's conditioning of his whole sensibility. His formative period under the dreaming spirit, among the fading blooms of romanticism, enveloped him in an aesthetic that hampered his adjustment to the modern movement. His first novel was an eighteenth-century pastiche, produced after several false starts as a playwright, and his first big success *Carnival* (1912) was a bitter-sweet romance, admirably suited to popular taste.

*Sinister Street* was the culmination of a style that looked unashamedly backward, to Meredith and James and made Connolly classify it, in a moment of generosity, as "an important bad book". Linklater makes a case for reading it as an anticipation of Freudian theory, in its exploration of sexual repression; and it is certainly bold enough to have been frowned on by a couple of generations of schoolmasters; but his flattering comparisons with Proust and Joyce are not convincing. Its morality is Catholic and essentially conservative, and it has dated, in a way that *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has not, largely through its failure to transcend the mannerisms of the period it portrays. It remains a product of Edwardian England, as Mackenzie himself largely remained—willing to reject the nineteenth century and not quite able to accept the twentieth.

Although he quickly recognized the war as a watershed, likely to render much of his world obsolete, he threw himself into it with characteristic élan. As a war-correspondent at Gallipoli his talent for establishing "a ruthless intimacy of understanding" attracted the notice of Intelligence, and before long he was appointed head of counter-espionage in Athens. He justified their faith in him by compiling a massive dossier of enemy agents, and inventing a system of visas (more or less as we know it today) as a cover for surveillance. His sympathy for the democratic premier, Venizelos, who shared his own Byronic dreams of Greek domination in the Eastern Mediterranean, led him to conspire on his own initiative for the overthrow of the pro-German king Constantine; and he pulled off an impressive series of coups towards that end. By 1917 he had turned the whole Cyclades archipelago into a small kingdom of his own, and ruled it with such disarming panache that the head of the Secret Service (later M16) proposed to

appoint him as his successor. Mackenzie declined, in favour of a return to writing; but the story had a dramatic sequel in 1932, when his memoirs of the campaign were presented under the Official Secrets Act—under direct pressure, as it turned out, from George V himself.

The next in a long series of island homes was Capri, where he and Faith became central figures in a colourful menagerie of expatriates, later portrayed in *South Wind* by their friend Norman Douglas. D. H. Lawrence was a frequent guest at their cliff-top villa, and became a favourite subject for impersonation in Mackenzie anecdotes (a comic turn that sounds genuinely funny). Their relations were surprisingly cordial but Lawrence later took a maliciously shrewd view of him in one of his best stories, *The Man Who Loved Islands* (1930) which satirized his lordly elegance and identified his need for barriers against his irrational self. It was clearly inspired by Mackenzie's financially disastrous experiment as landlord of Herm in the Channel Islands, where he re-settled in 1921 and presided a benevolent despotism over a discordant community of natives. The character's search for a "perfect unchanging world", which leads him to seek out ever more remote islands to inhabit, is a reflection of Mackenzie's own subsequent retreat, with an obvious sense of relief, to the neighbouring islet of Jethou.

Mackenzie was now working fast enough to turn out three or four books a year—but quality was being sacrificed to quantity, in a manner reminiscent of Sir Walter Scott, in order to meet the cost of his lavish way of living, and there are few signs of a troubled artistic conscience. "You get no sense from him that he feels his work has gone to pieces", Scott Fitzgerald observed to a friend after a visit in 1925. "He's not pompous about his prior output. I think he's just tired. The war wrecked him, as it did Wells and many of that generation..." Cultural shell-shock may have been a factor, but Mackenzie's tireless

energy rather belies this diagnosis. The deepening vacuum in his work looks more like an effect of the profit motive, and his actorish tendency to look more outward than inward.

Whatever the explanation, it seems plain that even the grand projects for serious fiction, realized in the form of a religious trilogy (1922-4), the long series becalmed *The Theatre of Youth*, and the vast autobiographical tetralogy *The Four Winds of Love* (1937-45), are fairly flawed by his peculiar brand of egotism, and an incurable prolixity. Few have been reprinted, and it is not easy to verify Linklater's claims for their virtues; but his vivid synopses convey a distinct impression that they are as dull in their worthiness, as the comedies are dull in their determination to amuse. The one possible exception, and the likeliest candidate for re-issue, is his last serious novel, *Thin Ice* (1956)—a first-person narrative in the voice of a black-mailed homosexual, drawn from the experiences of Tom Driberg and Harold Nicolson, which openly attacked the injustices of the existing laws.

He had touched the subject before, in *Extraordinary Women* (1928), a fairly daring picture of lesbian intrigues on Capri, and it seems to have brought out the best in him; but his identification with the outcast is clearly no reflection of his own sexuality. His childless marriage to Faith, which lasted in a public sense until her death in 1960, had been an "open" relationship since the Armistice, when he learned of her infidelity during his absence; and he seems never to have been short of mistresses thereafter. After the highly literate and often highly strung Faith, his taste seems to have turned to simpler natures. When one of his *alter egos* remarks that "Men with brains are happiest with wives who express essential womanhood", he seems to mean the young Hebridean girl, Christie MacSween, who became his "housekeeper" for thirty-five years end later his second wife.

For the meditative hero of *The Four Winds of Love*, the climax of a long spiritual quest, the embrace of the land of his ancestors,

conceived as the spirit of the feminine:

I love Scotland, and whenever and wherever I feel that glow, I see my heart beating as women in their day have set it beating. . . . The love I have for Scotland seems to me now the finest and perfect expression of my own vitality within the bounds of mortal flesh.

It is well to be reminded that, if his crowded career had ended in the mid-1920s, he would no more be considered as a Scot, nowadays, than the Australian premier of the same name. Bonnie Prince Charlie had been his nursery idol and he had gone to war flying the Lion Rampant; but he was forty-three before he set foot on Scottish soil. Casting around for a new background, he had just failed to purchase a coveted house in Ireland; and he was drawn north only when a group of islets in the Minch were accidentally knocked down to him for a bargain at a London auction.

What followed was a remarkable exercise in re-identification, even for one of his proven talents as a borrower of colours ("I can scarcely remember a time when I was not a perfervid Gael"). Native Scots are not unaccustomed to the spectacle of long-lost sons turning up, after an absence of generations, to declaim their patriotism in dress-tartan. But when Mackenzie suddenly mounted the sponsox to promote the new Scottish Nationalist movement, and to lecture the populace on his ideals for "a federation of Celtic states", he must have called up untapped reserves of native cynicism.

"For many years a sentimental Jacobinism is the emotion that has kept alive the idea of Scotland as a nation," began one of his polemics, "and it is now the duty of the nationalist leaders to see that such fervour is given an opportunity for practical expression." The choice of phrasing here, beginning with an apparent condemnation of the sentimental and ending with a plea for its expression in action, could hardly be more revealing. This whole chapter is a useful reminder that Mackenzie's romanticism, with its religious and royalist flavour, moulded many of the original features

of the nationalist movement that continue to alienate the Scottish Left. And it does not reflect well on his principal co-founder Hugh MacDiarmid, who must have found him a useful asset for publicity, that he compromised his own socialism merely to endorse Mackenzie's "unimpaired, undeviated intuition of the Commons of Scotland".

His parliamentary ambitions were short-lived, but his conversion went deep enough to keep him resident in Scotland, apart from a few post-war years, until his death in 1972. He was the knight of the airwaves, by that time, and "the sun-king of Edinburgh society", holding court in a large New Town house; but the background still most often associated with him is the Outer Hebrides. The island of Barra, where he spent the Second World War and set several comedies besides *Whisky Galore*, had appealed to him instantly as a self-contained society, in which every islander could regard himself as "an aristocrat of the democracy". I have personally heard more than one islander deplore his patronizing version of the local speech (what Linklater calls his "secure command of Gaelic endemics"), but he was obviously an honoured resident there, and they were not ungrateful for the tourist trade he attracted.

The true story of the plundered whisky-cargo crates an interesting sidelight on his methods in the novel, but it would be hard to deny that the film is an improvement on both. He wrote the screenplay himself (one of the few genres in which he was not staggeringly prolific) and also played the part of Captain McKechie. It is probably a matter for regret that he did not become a film-star, as he would have liked, and thus enabled posterity to judge more of his performances as he played them. Mr Linklater, who clearly endorses his father's praise of him as "the very top and flourish of good company", points out that the harshest critics of Mackenzie are those who never had the pleasure of seeing him in action; and his portrait is certainly life-like enough to explain how he was seduced.

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Barbara Hardy

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Anthologists walk a tight-rope. We like them to be neither idiosyncratic nor bland, to reveal patterns of history and genre while stamping a mindprint on miscellany. This collection teems with too many good poems to be dull, but lacks shape and signature.

The big names—Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Stevie Smith, Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich, spread over many pages. There are recent favourites such as Amy Clampitt, Wendy Cope and Selina Hill. The selective scatter reaches Australia, New Zealand and Canada as well as the United Kingdom and America. The editor deliberately excludes high-pitched screams, rough aggressions, ragged confessions, incantations. She has a habit of hedging round her categories with so many qualifications that they shrink to nothing; I found no stated reason for omitting, say, the structured, impressionist reasoning of incantatory poetry like Anne Ridler's "A Matter of Life and Death" or some of Ruth Fainlight's *Sybil*s. The mystical and visionary are out. So is the id, the radical shout and the linguistic experiment (the one exception is Adrienne Rich. Fleur Adcock's selection seems to compound an inclination in which women's poetry to be civilized, hyperconscious, reconciliatory, unified. The super-ego rules. Rebellions against form are barely visible. A line of comic or playful defensiveness verges at times on the arch or cute; it often appears, in Frances Cornford, Edna St Vincent Millay, the sweet Elizabeth Daryush, Wendy Cope, Margaret Atwood's musing but one-read stand, "Sirens", and the extravagantly admired, understandably beloved, over-represented Stevie Smith. Some of this might have been replaced by Diane Wakoski, Judith Johnson Sherwin, or women's poetry about the Spanish Civil War. But it's too tempting to argue with the judge. Fleur Adcock uses the word "justice" as if critics deck in absolutes. She should look back at the hard record of contemporary judgments over the centuries, smile and be sceptical.

Adrienne Rich stands for radical feminism, trying for new languages. (She is also one of the most learnedly allusive of the poets here.) Somewhat isolated among the tamer feminists, she comes over—despite the stridency of polemic, for which the editor's distaste is understandable—as wonderfully rough, true, intellectually, as well as affectively brave. Quiet feminism has its moments, starting with Anna Wickham's short, understated "Fired Pot", in which a woman watching sisters "Passionate about pios, and pence, and soap" is fired (inflamed and toughened) by a soldier's advances, declined but enjoyed. Many poets make up the civilized face of sexual politics. Including Louise Glück, Denise Levertov, May Swenson, June Cooper, and, despite her wildness and a storm, Sylvia Plath, the most distinguished instance of an imagination which includes but transcends feminist attack, jealousy, and bitterness. (The dedication to Plath's "Elm" is left out: why? Dedications are usually regarded as part of the text.) Elizabeth Bartlett's "Contra Jour" uses woman's drudgery both to specify and to motoymize social victims. Tess Gallagher's "Each Bird Walking" outmatches her splendid "Instructions to the Double", moving from woman to man in a powerfully tender poem about a man's tenderness. Elina Mitchell's "Thoughts after Ruskin" races with violent imagery of bloody passages and hairy cranialles, but its final descent to ironies about cosmetic lilies and roses is a final instance of the womanly reconciling urge. It is a relief to move from conversion and assimilations of had feallog to Rich's reconstructive raging, exalted by context.

That original poet and eccentric thinker, Laura Riding, refuses to be included in a woman's anthology. There is only a sentence in the introduction for her spare force. Elizabeth Bishop, richly and soddily dominant here, shared Riding's views, but editor and executor had the last word. Since Fleur Adcock half-

apologetically lays the responsibility for including two of her own poems at the door of her editor, a man, she might have taken time to justify appropriating the now passive Bishop. There are other omissions too, mostly in evaluative argument, some of which seems almost ashamed of its own weakness. The contrast between Moore and Bishop seems unjustified and unillustrated. There is one dangling "of course" which marks a gap in argument: "what is different about poetry by women, of course, is not its nature but the fact that until recently it has been undervalued and to some extent neglected."

One of the vast differences between women's poetry and men's is that there is very little women's poetry. The editor claims historical concern but nowhere looks back at the last century. The Victorian novel was largely shaped by women but you can write a history of Victorian poetry without mentioning more than two women. Why? The editor says that men have used the image of a female, the Muse, excluding women from inspiration, but ignores the socio-sexual implications of the myth. She says vaguely that "a lot" of women were writing—I think she means in the early decades of this century—but never seems to read the pattern of her own book. The volume starts strongly with the erotic, vigorous and ranging imagination of Charlotte Mew, in poems creating masculine centres for lyrical narratives of desire and thirst. Despite Adcock's inclusion of as many writers as possible from the early period and exclusion of poets born after 1945, the proportions are eloquent: fourteen poets with birth-dates in the last century, fifty with birth-dates in this one.

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The Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper, Blake Morrison's second collection, is full of poems that seem engrossed by the workings of their own language. "Night Mail" offers itself as a politicized rewriting for the 1980s of Auden's famous poem. But, where Auden concludes with a question which invites our assent ("For who can bear to feel himself forgotten?"), Morrison finishes with an image (the future's "unopened envelope waiting down the line") that has its eye as much on itself as on its subject. More purposefully, the title poem relates the "career" of Peter Sutcliffe to the assumptions of a culture that believes "mee must have powerance/or world will go to rot", and narrates it in a Yorkshire dialect through

May 24th, 1980

I have braved, for want of wild beasts, steel cages,  
carved my term and nickname on bunks and rafters,  
lived by the sea, flashed aces in an oasis,  
dined with the devil-knows-whom; to tails, on truffles.  
From the height of a glacier I beheld half a world, the earthy  
width. Twice have drowned, thrice let knives rake my nitty-gritty.  
Quit the country that bore and nursed me.  
Those who forgot me would make a city.  
I have waded the steppes that saw yelling Huns in saddles,  
worn the clothes nowadays back in fashion in every quarter,  
planted rye, tarred the roofs of pigsties and stables;  
guzzled everything save dry water.  
I've admitted the sentries' third eye into my wet and foul  
dreams. Munched the bread of exile: it's stale and warty.  
Granted my lungs all sounds except the howl  
switched to a whisper. Now I am forty.  
What should I say about life? That it's long and abhors permanence.  
Broken eggs make me grieve; the omelette, though, makes me vomit.  
Yet until brown clay has been crammed down my larynx,  
only gratitude will be gushing from it.

JOSEPH BRODSKY



A detail from Esther Bubley's photograph of girls in a cafeteria is reproduced from Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women photographers for the US government, 1935 to 1944 by Andrea Fisher (160pp. Pandora, £9.95. 086358 123 4).

She says that women refuse to think it's too late to start, but this is because many of them haven't had the acculturated confidence and free affective experience to begin early. Louise Bogan in "Women" (not here) observes that "Women have no wilderness in them". The wilderness, not the home, is where the Muse is bappy. There are moments when Fleur Adcock's fast-moving, wide-ranging, often self-erasing train of thought veers close to this

subject, but doesn't touch and stay. Her introduction is too personal, often unprofessional in tone, argument and information. It is unimpaired, conceptually shy.

We must be grateful for the poems, which speak for themselves, through likeness, unlikeliness and limits. Though the anthologist takes no risks, she strikes a good balance between old and new, representation in breadth and small sample.

which misogyny betrays itself.

That, at any rate, is the idea. A note glosses "powerance" as "the upper hand"; the phrase is one of a number where dialect is handled in a way that feels closer to excavation than speech. What prompts more serious concern (and consorts uneasily with the poem's feminist attitudes) is the ventriloquizing relish with which the unavoidably gory details are recounted. The blurb's construction of a narrator, "unnamed and enigmatic", merely shifts the buck. At its best, the poem is sardonic, impassioned and oddly tender. Yet the experiment with dialect as look arty, aestheticizing: "E which-kebab'd their pupils" may be gruesome and "ah mend em all wi kindness" wish-fulfilling, but both lines are too self-contentedly the product of textual "play".

Morrison's poems are strong on tricks and effects, short on arrangements of words that strike the mind and ear as inevitable. "Mist" is a garrulously secret narrative that abuses the freedoms offered by "like" and provides a spectacular display of overwriting: "But when I woke in the morphine of evening / the sky was

ridged with quiet like a scallop shell". "We played out our drama of abandonment", gushes the narrator at one point, but "drama" is conspicuously absent from this self-indulgent piece. The poem's robes, at once Marian and Motinesque, have that borrowed air which sometimes haunts Morrison's language.

At times there is an attempt to make a virtue out of what may be a necessity, as if the poet believed with Barthes that "the text is a time of quotations". The opening of "Summer burning" ("Was it thrip or thrip . . .") acknowledges its entrance into Heaney territory by way of a glancing allusion to the start of "Summer Home" ("Was I wind off the clump . . ."). "Supertore" begins with a parody of Larkin at his most drab as it catalogues "kiddyseats, barbecues, / woodfeller, Polybags, turps"; it tries to get out of trouble by dallying with cliché ("I could go on, and do go on"); the fifth stanza's metaphor of "screened confessions" where we "learn new versions of ourselves" switches on to a different though familiar stylistic track; the conclusion's "darkness where no one's serving / and there's nothing to choose from at all" swings back to Larkin at his most glum. The poem is well-meaning and well observed; but it collapses into gestures, seems an anthology of styles.

A similar ambivalence is provoked by the more overtly political "Xerox". Though the details are striking ("A lightshow begins under the trapdoor: / it flashes and roars, flashes and plashes"), it's doubtful whether they "add up", despite the swagger with which the final stanza braves this very issue: "And what has this to do with it?" The plainer, graver style in which the last paragraph of "On Sizewell Beach" is written is impressive, however. The syntactical control and momentum (the paragraph is a single sentence) contribute to the poem's success:

as eternity of bodywork blotting out the view,  
a cloud or an eclipse which hangs before the eye  
and darkens all behind them, clearing at last  
to the joy of finding her still standing there,  
the three of us spared that other life we dream of  
where the world has already happened  
and we are made to dwell forever on its shore.

The shadowing of present joy by imagined disaster is perhaps the collection's deepest note. Along with a clutch of shorter, less ambitious but fully achieved poems ("Pomagne", "Winter", and "Greensick", in particular), "Sizewell Beach" shows what this talented poet is capable of when the search for effect gives way to a trust in feeling.

# Blown on the wind

Alistair Hennessy

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The Mexican Revolution, beginning in 1910, was the first of the great social upheavals of the twentieth century and, in its scale and its violence, has had few parallels. Interpretations of it are both conflicting and confusing, and until recently its historians have been less than helpful in explaining it. The very complexity and incoherence of the early days—"one damn caudillo after another", with a depressing catalogue of slaughtered leaders: Madero, Carranza, Villa, Zapata, Obregón and many lesser figures, whose betrayals and duplicity bred a cynicism which finds pungent expression in the murals of Orozco—was a powerful deterrent to scholarship. Historians needed strong stomachs, endless patience and empathy with the unfamiliar to make sense of such incoherence, and while they dithered, the popular vision of the Revolution held sway, peddled by Hollywood and its Mexican imitators, of a Mexico peopled by bandoliered, mustacheoed, drink-sodden, drug-stupefied bandits.

The dust has now settled, however, and we are reaching a position where probably more is known about the Mexican than about any other twentieth-century revolution, although its essence still remains elusive. Compared with the accounts of the endless shuffling of bureaucrats' papers and hair-splitting party congresses which sometimes pass for the history of the Russian Revolution, those of the Mexican are richly rewarding. This has been due partly to the work of anthropologists, which has enabled historians to reach a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of local life and to approach the tortuous course of the Revolution from below. From the accounts of local rivalries one derives a greater sympathy for those politicians who have subsequently been so obsessed with the problems of law and order and the fabrication of a revolutionary consensus. It is due also to the recent historiographical renaissance, in which Mexican historians themselves have played the leading role, with support from the huge graduate programmes of American universities.

It is perhaps premature to speak of a British school of Mexican history, although the contribution made by historians here has been substantial. The most recent one, and the most impressive so far, is Alan Knight's remarkable *The Mexican Revolution*, which must rank among the finest pieces of historical scholarship to have appeared in this country over the past decade, and deserves a much wider audience than Mexicanists alone (it is symptomatic of the academic times in Britain that Knight has moved to Texas). It might indeed succeed in doing what no other work has so far done—in making other historians take Latin American and especially Mexican history seriously. Although readers may well blush at some of its complexities, the subtle construction of the book, with its changes of pace and style as narrative alternates with analysis, punctuated by perceptive comments on the nature of historical processes, enlivened by amusing vignettes and apt quotation, and encompassing a wide range of comparisons with social development elsewhere, makes it a rewarding experience. Knight has read and absorbed the literature of political scientists and development economists without being seduced by them; he listens to their jargon but incorporates their findings. Historians of other revolutions will find much of value and wisdom here.

Earlier studies have tended to concentrate on the heroic period between 1910 and 1920, whereas more recently there has been a concentration on the chaotic phase of the post-

1920s, partly in an attempt to explain "what has gone wrong". Assumptions that the Revolution lost its way presuppose a view of what it was about in the first place. Knight concentrates on the early period, tracing the causes and course of the Revolution up to the 1920s and in doing so offers little comfort to those who want to categorize it as peasant, bourgeois, petit-bourgeois or whatever. He admits to being an unashamed conservative and anti-revisionist, believing that Frank Tannenbaum "grasped the character of the 1910 Revolution as a popular, agrarian movement—the precursor, the necessary precursor, of the *étatiste* revolution of post 1920". Tannenbaum, the co-founder of Lázaro Cárdenas, president from 1934 to 1940, who breathed new life into the agrarian revolution after his predecessor Calles had pronounced it finished in 1930, had an empathy with the Indian peasantry, who appear in revisionist accounts only as a passive, manipulable mass or as cannon-fodder for dogmatic theorists. As Knight remarks, "Marxist historians (of abstract bent) still assert the central role of the masses, but they often assert more than they illustrate". The great quality of this book is that it sets out to illustrate and in doing so brings out the immense variations and complexity of local regional politics, the central role of clientelist relationships and the nature of *caudillo* rule. It has taken many years for historians to recognize that Namier rather than Marx might provide a more illuminating guide to the study of Latin American societies, at least in the initial phase, before resorting to generalization based on class analysis.

Knight does not claim to be comprehensive in his treatment. The wider diplomatic repercussions are only touched on, but these have been amply and painstakingly covered in Friedrich Katz's *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution*. Knight's heavy reliance on foreign sources is to be explained by their accessibility as well as by their richness and surprising perceptiveness. The wealth of those sources is evidence of the importance which the United States and Europe placed on a country which was the world's largest oil producer before the First World War and which seemed also to provide a model for development in the neo-European world. Knight's sources inevitably concentrate on the capital, Mexico City, although not exclusively so, but he swims with current trends in also drawing sustenance from the work of local and regional historians.

Mexico in 1910 serves as a warning not to be misled by outward appearance. The century celebrations of independence provided an occasion for advertising the modernity of the Mexican State and the triumphs of the developmental philosophies of the day. But the peasantry was a facade. There had been rumblings—strikes in the copper mines at Cananea and in the textile factories of Rio Blanco, and graphic accounts of rural misery, as in Turner's *Barbarous Mexico*, with its story of slave conditions on the plantations of southern Mexico—but these were discounted as the inevitable, but perhaps only temporary, social costs of economic progress, the growing pains inseparable from modernization, and were swept aside by the flow of adulation.

It has become accepted wisdom that dislocations in poor countries are a consequence of imperialist expansion and exogenous influences and it cannot be denied that a thirty-fold increase in foreign investment during the Porfiriato, mainly from the United States, dislocated local communities, as in the case of those affected by the railway-building programme. But Knight, rightly I think, gives these influences a low priority as a causal factor. Remarkably, of all the great revolutions of the twentieth century only those in Latin America—Mexico and Cuba—have not come as a result of war against an outside power. War provides one of the most effective ways of mobilizing peasants by politicizing them in discontented armies where they become accessible to radical agitators.

What has to be explained in the Mexican case is why and how peasants, in the absence of an external war, were roused and mobilized in such numbers, and it is here that Knight's work is most convincing. In addition to providing a stimulating survey of the causes of peasant discontent, he differentiates between varying

types of unrest, making a distinction between *serrano* and agrarian revolts. Although these are not mutually exclusive, the antithesis points the contrast between movements located in isolated mountainous communities reacting against threats from encroaching State power and increased fiscal burdens, and agrarian movements where changes in agricultural practices disrupted traditional village communities—the most famous example being in Morelos, where sugar plantations, expanding to fill the vacuum left by the decline in Cuban sugar production in the 1890s, dispossessed villagers of their land and by overriding traditional communal rights fuelled the *zapatista* movement. It is not, Knight comments, exploitation *per se* but arbitrary exploitation which fuels moral outrage and sustains the momentum of peasant rebellion.

Some historians have been quick to dismiss *zapatismo* and other peasant movements as reactionary. Peasants betray that alliance between workers and peasants on which any "genuel" revolutionary movement must rest. But Jan Meyer's view, although perhaps overstated, is that the largest peasant mobilization during the Revolution—the *cristero* movement, the great afterglow of counter-revolutionary thunder of the mid-1920s—drew its strength from outrage at town-based anti-clericals, who in desecrating churches were destroying the sanctified symbols of community in the name of an abstract principle which might or might not bring benefits in its wake. Who were the revolutionaries and who the reactionaries? Knight argues that it was a "reactive" violence based on communities whose norms were nostalgic which underpinned the Revolution.

Remove the charismatic source of royal justice and legitimacy and to whom and to what does one appeal? In societies where bureaucratic norms do not prevail the source of justice will be personalized. It may seem odd to attribute this to rough *caudillos* but in such societies the bonds of personal loyalties and mutual

obligations are paramount. Dudley Ankersen, whose *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí* (also the stamping-ground of the precursor movement), is an excellent example of the regional studies now appearing, recounts a recent reunion of *cedillistas* he attended. As one of them put it: "We loved the General, you know. Everything we have, everything we are, we owe to him." Ankersen comments: "personal loyalty toward their leader and pride in their association, the rewards of patronage and the penalties of clientship—in those few sentences he summarized Cedillo's rule". In the Mexican ballad literature of the *corridos* there are countless examples of admiration for the bonds of loyalty and for courage in their defence, and only rarely echoes of abstract ideas.

The reasons for middle-class discontent are more accessible and it may be that exogenous factors were more important in explaining the alienation of the middle classes from the Porfirian régime, as business men and landowners were adversely affected by the economic and financial crises of the pre-1910 years. But a key factor lay in the non-circulation of the top jobs. The Porfiriato was a gerontocracy, as any photograph of Porfirio's cabinet with their white beards cascading over their chests testifies. Two were over eighty, the youngest was fifty-five. Of the state governors, two were over eighty, six over seventy, seventeen over sixty. With many of them in power for over twenty years, it is scarcely surprising that non-re-election was—end remains—the cardinal tenet of revolutionary ideology. Where in clientelist politics government is a source of enrichment, a circulation of élites is crucial to the health of the system as well as to the pockets of the incumbents.

What does the Mexican Revolution stand for and who are its beneficiaries? The 1917 Constitution is an earnest of intent, with its cultural and economic nationalism, anti-clericalism, indianism, agrarianism, labourism, non-interventionism, but until the formation of the PNR

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and its successor the PRI – the longest-surviving and most stable party in Latin American history (always excepting the Peruvian APRA) – there was no repository of revolutionary virtue.

It was Lenin's view that there could be no revolution without a revolutionary theory. By this criterion the Mexican Revolution would score a very low rating. But there cannot be a revolutionary theory without theorists and, as often as not, they are the members of the vanguard party, often comprising a majority of intellectuals, who tend to be the beneficiaries of revolutionary processes with their ability to articulate the yearnings of the intricate and, through their education, to see and grasp those opportunities which periods of change provide. The formlessness of the Revolution has often been attributed to the absence of intellectual direction. There was certainly no vanguard party or conspiratorial group producing blueprints of revolutionary strategy, and although some historians have seen the germ of one in the "precursor" movement, this never had time to achieve its potential. There were intellectuals enough – rare spirits like Antonio Caso, tortured ones like José Vasconcelos "resisting the triumph of the wicked and the imbeciles", practical men like Manuel Gamio, educator, archaeologist and ethnologist, painters like Francisco Goitia, David Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, and the novelists Mar-



A detail from Ramón Alva de la Canal's "El Café de Nadie", taken from *Futurism and Futurisms*, edited by Pomus Hulien and others (638pp. Thames and Hudson, £45).

tin Luis Gómez and Mariano Azuela, who attached themselves to caudillos, and everywhere – the historian has no business neglecting them – the *tinterillos*, the village schoolmasters and scribes, the literate leaders of the semi-literate and illiterate, like Otilio Montaño, Zapata's mentor.

It is nevertheless difficult not to agree with the view expressed by the intellectual in Azuela's novel *The Underdogs* that they "were like leaves blown on the wind". The day of the intellectuals would come in the great cultural renaissance of the 1920s and later, as Roderic Campbell has shown in his *Intellectuals and the*

*State in Twentieth-Century Mexico*, but no one succeeded in imposing a blueprint on the Revolution. Vasconcelos, who came nearer than most, was to be pushed aside, a political failure who would finish his days expressing views of a fascist kind. By the 1930s the officialist view of the Revolution made the task of alternative or oppositional interpretations a risky and unprofitable matter, as critics of school history text books were to discover.

There has been a tendency to interpret the Revolution in broadly antithetical terms by pitting the north against the centre (with a passive south and a virtually autonomous Yucatán), although in the final clash northerners fought against northerners. From this standpoint, the Revolution was fundamentally a revolt of the frontier against the metropolis, and the dominance of leaders from the northern states – Madero, Carranza, Villa, Obregón and Calles – gives some credence to this view. They were the cattlemen, miners, entrepreneurial farmers, socially and geographically mobile – the *frontera nómada* in Aguilar Camín's telling phrase – racially mixed and open to intellectual influences as well as to arms-receiving from across the United States border.

In the final instance, the Sonorans triumphed, with their scorn for communal folkways and their belief that there was nothing wrong which a good dose of the work ethic would not cure. They were the bulldozing

modernizers, the Piedmontese carpetbaggers of the Revolution whose preconceptions attempted to shink southern Mexico out of its Ichteague ways as the northern Italians had tried to do half a century before in the Italian south.

As now the academic equivalent of the *visiones del Norte* sweep down with their technical clobber and modernizing ways, it is refreshing to find the old view of the Revolution here being refurbished, with its memories of Tannuham and Cárdenas, huttock-sore from nuke-buck riding into mountainous recesses to bring the vision of agrarian redemption to isolated Indian communities. Out of that experience Tannuham fashioned his view of Mexico as a loose federation of autonomous village communities – a Proudhonist society which he juxtaposed with the positivist society of the Porfiriato and its successor régimes. That vision of the Revolution has become blurred as governments seem to have given up trying to reconcile the seemingly incompatible aims of agrarian reform with its social imperatives, and as agricultural revolution with its economic efficiency and productivity strains to meet the needs of burgeoning cities. The future lay with the modernizers of the Sonora dynasty. "The genius of revolutionary leadership", as Knight comments, "lay in its capacity to harness the energy and grievances of the popular movement to antithetical ends – state building and capitalist development."

promotions of "social justice" and of "peace". These are the very words used by Liberation theologians in Latin America to describe the impending paradise in Nicaragua.

The third area of Church-and-State conflict encompassed by these new works is Ireland. This is not, however, the misty Isle of "saints and scholars", with its treasured spirituality, and its vibrant and prized Catholicism – so successfully exported throughout the world in the nineteenth century – but a veritable hell-hole of clerical totalitarianism and priestly superstition. Tom Inglis offers a kind of neo-Joycean reflection on the state of Irish Catholicism; his exultant exaggerations are so gross as to make the reader wonder, at times, if *Moral Monopoly* is intended to be humorous. But the author is a professional sociologist, and claims his work as a serious and considered sociological survey of a deeply clericalized and controlled society. So great is the control, indeed, that its origins and effects are traced a long way back:

a moral discipline over passions and instincts which was best achieved through an internalization of shame and guilt about the body, a process which had originally been developed and exported to the Continent by Irish monks back in the sixth and seventh centuries.

The Catholic Church, according to Dr Inglis, is nothing but a bureaucratic machine constructed "to attain and maintain power"; it has retained control because "people were indoctrinated through a fear of being denied salvation". He is clearly not impressed with the long traditions of what Conor Cruise O'Brien used to call the "Parnellism" of Irish political expiation – the capability of Irish politicians to be good Catholics and yet to ignore the public teaching of the Church on social and political issues – and argues extensively about the hidden ways in which the hierarchy influences public men. A measure of truth here, of course, but all irredeemably mixed up with some very poor judgment. The statistical table of "bad luck" is amusing (surprisingly only 10 per cent in Ireland suppose it unlikely to walk under a ladder – the figure for England is surely much larger, despite the absence of an effective Church hierarchy peddling superstition in the way Inglis alleges exists in Ireland); so is the account of the "sexual frustration" genuine to the drinking rituals of Dublin public houses. The diatribes against the influence of the clergy are very dated; like a resuscitation of the hysterical strictures of Paul Blanchard, made in reference to the American Catholicism of the 1930s. But then Dr Inglis does not regard the Catholic Church as "a voluntary body". He believes its moral over-people's lives amounts to a tyrannical deprivation of personal liberty. He should try the Soviet Union.

## Doctrinal consequences

Alec Nove

FERENC FEHER and AGNES HELLER  
*Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, freedom and democracy*  
 287pp. Oxford: Polity, £25.  
 0745603203

*Eastern Left, Western Left* is a collection of papers by two distinguished Hungarian émigrés who now teach in Australia. Strongly influenced in their youth by the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács, they have modified their views considerably in the light of experience of "real socialism". Lukács "posited a collective redeemer, the world proletariat" and then shifted his faith to Lenin. The authors at first shared the illusion that Stalinism and its evils could be removed through a return to Leninism. They now see "redemptive and democratic paradigms" as mutually exclusive alternatives; they assign blame to "free-floating intellectuals", who as (Ferenc Feher puts it) "were profoundly responsible for corrupting social movements with their redemptive paradigm of politics". At the same time they cling to a socialist radical-democratic ideology, their ideal being expressed (in an essay by Agnes Heller) in the concept of "the Great Republic", in which socialism is combined with pluralism, human rights, a functioning civil society. In the view of the authors, Rosa Luxemburg typified this kind of leftism, which led her into conflicts with both Lenin and Trotsky, each in their own way redemptive-authoritarian.

## Problem-proletariat

Geoffrey Hosking

DONALD FILTZER  
*Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The formation of modern Soviet production relations, 1928-41*  
 338pp. Pluto, £25.  
 0745301576

Considering that the Soviet Union defined itself until 1936 as a "dictatorship of the proletariat", it is surprising how few scholars have actually studied that proletariat. Perhaps we have assumed that the sources would prove unrewarding, though a pioneering study by the Menshevik Solomon Schwarz, published in 1952, suggested otherwise. Or maybe we have felt that the notion of the workers as the ruling class under Stalin was too absurd to require serious investigation.

One way or the other, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization* has some surprises in store. It is one of the most important contributions of recent years to Soviet social history. Making exhaustive use of journals and newspapers from the 1930s in the industrial, trade-union and legal fields, Donald Filtzer shows that the workers, although they faced appalling conditions and were often grossly exploited, nevertheless managed to carve out for themselves a limited area of autonomy over the work-process, which in the long term has been sufficient to lasso and even frustrate the aims of the planning authorities. Under the first five-year plans, the régime's inflated planning targets imposed such strains on managers that they were prepared to concede almost anything to retain even minimally competent workers. The latter thus had a strong bargaining position, which they used to establish their own work-patterns. Workers found it more and more difficult to strike, or to mount any form of collective protest, but they could always go elsewhere to seek a better job, and to avoid this, managers would turn a blind eye to poor timekeeping, indiscipline, pilfering, drunkenness and corruption.

The régime devised various stratagems to overcome managerial leniency – "shock-work", "socialist competition", Stakhanovism. The best workers were offered awards and decorations, higher pay, better social security entitlements, and eventual co-optation upwards into officialdom. But these devices generated their own antidotes. They meant that the best workers ceased to be workers. Stakhanovites

in recent Hungarian history their model is Imre Nagy, who was shot after the 1956 uprising.

In such a context, what meaning is to be attached to terms such as "right" and "left"? In such a continuum, where would one put Stalin? Incidentally, Stalin massacred a very large proportion of the radical "free-floating intellectuals", accusing them of turn of left and right-wing deviations (or even of forming a "left-right centre"), but absolve all the crime of thinking for themselves. In their long introduction to the present volume, Feher and Heller point out that in the Soviet Union itself, which they see as neither capitalist nor socialist, "the distinction between Left and Right makes no sense at all in the officially tolerated political and cultural space". It must be said that in their comments on reform prospects in the Soviet Union the authors come close to proving that what is now happening under Gorbachev could not possibly have happened. Nor are they alone in their surprise. Needless to say, Gorbachev's radical-reform programme may fail, but their implied model of Soviet society would seem to have excluded even the attempt. This said, they remain correct in stressing the irrelevance of the left-right distinction in the Soviet context. Marxist dogmatists may regard the recognition of the need for "socialist markets", as "right", yet this is accompanied by stress on *glasnost*, the election of management by the workforce, attacks on privilege and corruption, which it is absurd to see as right-wing objectives.

Included in this volume is a perceptive essay on "The Social Character of Khrushchev's

Regime" by Feher. One must agree that this contradictory and colourful character was, on balance, a positive figure. The release of millions of political prisoners, plus a long list of social measures (improved pensions, elimination of tuition fees in secondary and higher education, a minimum wage, the repeal of the law forbidding workers to change their jobs, a better deal for the peasantry), all this was no mean achievement. However, given his background, he could not have been expected to understand, let alone dismantle, the Stalinist system, while he did remove its worst features, and sufficiently disturbed his more conservative colleagues for them to remove him. Interestingly, Feher himself argues that, if one accepts Lenin's concept of a "Jacobin dictatorship", Stalin was a "necessity". Indeed this is one reason why our two authors no longer accept Leninism.

In a vivid and perceptive paper entitled "In the Bestialium", Feher discusses barbarism in both its Nazi and Soviet-Stalinist versions. He then asserts that the amnesties under Khrushchev were confined to those who "admitted their guilt", and that "the few who insisted on their innocence were returned to the camps". He cites no evidence for what appears to be a quite incorrect statement.

The two authors join forces in a rather depressing essay on "being anti-nuclear in Soviet societies". They lay much stress on "Russian Chauvinism", the role of the Soviet army in providing avenues for social mobility, the use of "peace" for official propaganda. The whole issue is one in which the Western left is out of tune with the views of many "Eastern" dissidents. Some of their observations can be queried. Thus it is really true that the ordinary Soviet citizen has no fear of nuclear war? It is certainly no longer the case that the Soviet authorities refuse to follow the public exhibition of films showing the consequences of such a war. While clearly distancing themselves from Reagan's rhetoric and arms build-up, the authors tend to play down the dangers which

right-wing ideological militancy could pose, and its effect on the perceptions of the Soviet leadership. (I am writing this review in California, and have just seen a television programme devoted to the career of President Johnson which included a statement to the effect that General Curtis LeMay advised the launching of a nuclear strike against China as the way to win the Vietnam war. Of course Johnson rejected this advice, but it is not only in the West that the military draw up "worst-case" scenarios.)

Feher and Heller are joint authors of one of the best of the book's essays, on "Class, Modernity and Democracy". They challenge several opinions widely held on the left. Thus: "Where there is class there is liberty." Another way of making the same point is to say that a thoroughgoing despotism requires a classless society, since otherwise at least the ruling class will have rights. They challenge the notion that "modern societies can be reduced to the polarity of two classes alone". Then it is good to read that "we categorically reject the Marxian-Lukácsian distinction between the empirical and imputed consciousness of the working class", stressing the "elitist-Leninist consequences" of any such doctrine. They likewise reject, and rightly, the notion that one can conceivably elevate the working class into the position of a ruling class. Indeed the whole concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is devoid of meaning, and it is all too true, as the authors state, that new and more powerful chains can be (have been) forged for the workers "in the name of their own emancipation".

Here and there the authors, whose native language is not English, would have benefited from linguistic editing. Thus Babeuf has a "choleric temperature", there is a reference to "dominant social imagery", the military rank of Marshal always has two ls. But these are minor blemishes. Anyone interested in left-wing politics and in Eastern Europe will find here much to stimulate the mind and to argue about.

"[Scholem's] work on Jewish mysticism, messianism, and sectarianism, spanning now half a century, constitutes, I should think, one of the major achievements of the historical imagination in our time. I would contend that it is of vital interest not only to anyone concerned with the history of religion but to anyone struggling to understand the underlying problematics of the human predicament."

—Robert Alter, *Commentary*

## ORIGINS OF THE KABBALAH

GERSHOM SCHOLEM

Translated by Allan Arkush and Edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky

Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) opened up a once esoteric world of Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah, to concerned students of religion: a tradition of repeated attempts to achieve and portray direct experiences of God. In 1973 Princeton University Press published R. J. Zwi Werblowsky's translation of Scholem's masterly *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Bollingen Series XCII). Now Princeton presents the first English translation of *Origins of the Kabbalah*, a work that probes the twelfth- and thirteenth-century beginnings of the Kabbalah in southern France and Spain. A contribution not only to the history of Jewish medieval mysticism but to the study of medieval mysticism in general, the book will be of surpassing interest to historians and psychologists, as well as to students of the history of religion. The text and annotations have been edited and brought up to date by Professor Werblowsky. Published in association with the Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia. Cloth: \$47.50 (U.S.).

Order from your local bookseller or from

Princeton University Press

15A Epsom Road  
 Guildford Surrey GU1 3JT

Johannes 1.16



# New Zealand notes

## Christopher Hitchens

Super-suburbia of the Southern Seas, Nature's - and Reason's - true Anipades, Hail, dauntless pioneers, intrepid souls, Who cleared the Bush - to make a lawn for bowls, And smashed the noble Maori to ensure The second race were socially secure!

Wynford Vaughan-Thomas's *Farwell to New Zealand* both drew upon, and helped to perpetuate, a stock image of the country that remains undimmed. "Miles from anywhere - and that's Australia"; jokes about Kiwis and sheep (in themselves rather comic-inducing subjects); above all, the idea of an unthinking mimesis of Englishness; made more absurd and parodic by its location in the Pacific. Southern Rhodesia and the Falklands could be made to appear Parnassian by contrast.

Stereotypes are a hardy breed, and this one has outlived its subject by almost a generation. Though much of New Zealand still looks amazingly like Cornwall or the Home Counties, and though rugby is still a ruling passion and Victorian emulation a persistent style, it would no longer be fair for Vaughan-Thomas to say:

Saved by the Wowsers from the Devil's Tricks  
Your shops, your pubs, your minds all close  
at six . . .

The Wharries' Heaven, the gourmet's Purgatory:  
Ice-cream on mutton, swilled around in teal

In 1972, for instance, Germaine Greer came to New Zealand from Sydney to promote *The Female Eunuch*. A local journalist had just been jailed for employing the word "bullshit" in public. Ms Greer agreed to repeat the word, with some embellishments, in the hope of ridiculing the law. She overestimated the local tolerance for irony, refused to pay the resulting fine, and escaped arraignment only by leaving the country. In theory, she still cannot return to these "boring, parochial little islands". But if she were to do so, she would find that the mae who said "bullshit", Timothy Shadbolt, is presenting one of the nation's leading television shows. And the woman who organized her 1972 trip, Susan Kedgley, is a prominent documentary producer whose latest work is a film profile of Katherine Mansfield and an emphatically worded feature entitled *Germaine Greer Revisited*.

## Australian note

### Jeremy Treglown

What is a literary journal for? In its twentieth-century forms, especially the "little magazine", it evolved partly - though less than is often claimed - as a vehicle for the avant-garde: a place where recalcitrant new work could be published, and where its claims could be argued. But that role has disappeared now that there isn't much of a literary avant-garde, in the 1920s sense. The innovations of recent writing have been easily understood and assimilated; good new work is, on the whole, pretty accessible (at least to a readership brought up on Joyce and Eliot), and readily finds a market. In a world where a writer of any talent is quickly taken up by large commercial publishers, popular magazines and television, the little magazine has become superfluous.

So, at any rate, Ian Hamilton argued at a recent conference on literary journals at the Humanities Research Centre in Canberra, though hardly anyone seemed to think he was serious. To most of the seventy or so people taking part - chiefly Australian literary academics and the editors of academically respectable literary journals - this was the kind of coat-tailing you get at a conference, or perhaps just English irony. Similarly ignored, at least in the public discussion, was Peter Porter's pragmatic defence of routine reviewing, whether in small-circulation magazines or in the Sunday newspapers, as a valuable form of brokerage between a wide range of new work and its potential readership.

It may have been the humility of the job. Porter described that effectively put it off the agenda. A conference is a serious thing. But he may, like Ian Hamilton, have touched a nerve

If you want honest roast mutton these days,  
you have to search. It's all *nouvelle cuisine*.

★ ★ ★

The national shame, even so, is the undoubted fact that most New Zealanders of distinction became distinguished, like David Low, because they left. As next year's Katherine Mansfield centenary approaches, the country is beginning to take the measure of its most famous daughter. At her old school, the Samuel Marsden Collegiate School for Girls, there is as yet no plaque. For decades, the young ladies were not taught anything of the existence of their most famous old girl. The official history of the academy records sourly that her contemporaries "resented the fact that her ambitions, moods and restless longings invaded and disturbed their world of conformity".

"These people have not learned their alphabet yet", said Katherine Mansfield on her own return visit to Wellington from London. Yet she found the memory of the country very hard to erase. The death of her Anzac brother Leslie in Flanders set her to writing "The Aloe", which became "Prelude" and which still amazes New Zealanders by its power to evoke. Towards her own death, writing in the Swiss Alps, she seemed almost to summon the old country in spite of having changed both the names that bound her to it.

Katherine Mansfield: *A woman, a writer*, produced by Susan Kedgley, switches between New Zealand and Europe very deftly. Born in Wellington as she was, K.M. believed in the influence of the elements on birth. She stressed the wind, as well she might. It can still lift you off your feet at the hilltop memorial to Admiral Byrd. In Wellington, the renewing gale is the dominant climatic and conversational theme. It seems to have been blowing and cleansing long enough to permit a rehabilitation and some reconsideration of K.M. Brashness and mimicry - those allegedly New Zealand qualities - were considered to be evidence of both vulgarity and energy when she was at Garsington. The original North Island can hardly afford to esteem her less.

★ ★ ★

Late in life Samuel Butler was to deny it, but his earliest published work was *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, assembled by his father the Canon out of his letters home. His five years of sheep-farming in New Zealand, which made him prosperous and fitted him out (as he thought) with an income for life, were not passed entirely among his flocks. He contributed (to *The Press*, a quasi-literary journal) the first sketch of *Erewhon*, which was *Darwin Among the Moehles*. It appeared in New Zealand in 1863 and was expanded and re-written for Holyoake's *Reasoner* in 1865. So Butler, who came to England precisely to escape from ordination, could hardly be said to have found a Wowser's paradise.

*Erewhon's* subtitle is *Over the range*, and the initial depiction of the hills and countryside, including the portrait of Chowbok, are a distillation of New Zealand as Butler remembered it. Thus, though New Zealand has often been lampooned as a Victorian pastiche of a country, in the high Victorian period it was the setting for a book, and an author, inverting all that made Victorian society recognizable. Sad, then, for local pride that he repudiated his Canterbury papers and always insisted that *Erewhon* was "Op 1".

★ ★ ★

Kipling wrote of Auckland that it was "last, loneliest, loveliest, exquisite, apart". He was blything the white dominions at the time, though of course he had in common with other imperialists an admiration for the valour and integrity of the Maoris. Today, Auckland can accurately be called the largest city of Polynesia, with a considerable population of Samoan and other islanders as well as of Maoris. The Museum, which is also called the War Museum, might have pleased Kipling. It is largely given over to a Cenotaph and to the display of regimental battle-standards and memorabilia. But its largest annex is consecrated to the Maori tribes and their artefacts and language. The renowned *Te Maori* exhibition was housed here for a while (why has it travelled to America and not to Britain?) In deference to the bi-national character of New Zealand, an illustration of a Second World War troopship records that it brought back the Maori volunteers to *Aotearoa*, the Maori name

for the country meaning "Land of the Long White Cloud".

A revival of Maori self-consciousness has been a necessary corollary to the re-examined identity of New Zealand that followed the slackening of ties with Britain in the 1970s. A recent report to the Minister of Maori Affairs contains a fascinating series of New Zealand state and commercial advertisements down the decades. All the reproductions share a consistent theme - the use of Maori images and crafts to lend an air of quaintness and exotica to the staid national landscape. The use of the "Maori maiden" motif, as revealed here, would embarrass even the most hardened sceptic on matters racist and sexist.

One reaction to this has been a cultural nationalist one, with "Roots"-orientated Maoris taking back the bequests that their ancestors made to museums and collections. This tendency is limited. It is also much less striking, to a visitor, than is the willingness to employ the Maori term "pakeha" to describe themselves. There's an element of white guilt in the usage, which denotes the latecomer and settler, but it's arguably an improvement on the use of the word "Maori" to mean tourist attraction.

★ ★ ★

In the old days, if South Africa didn't want Maori members of the touring New Zealand rugby team, it didn't get Maori members. By "the old days" I mean fifteen years ago. Maoris were not even allowed, when they toured more tolerant countries, to do their traditional *haka* dance before the game. Rugby football was so essential to New Zealand culture that this did not even seem worthy of remark. One of the most influential books published in the country in the last two decades was *Mud in Your Eye*, a study of the rugby cult by one of its leading votaries. Chris Laidlaw was an All Black himself, and one of the sweetest half-backs that an *aficionado* can remember. He was hard to laugh off, then, when he wrote that "conformity is the cornerstone of New Zealand society" and argued for multi-racial sport at home and abroad. It's an emblem of the change in the tone and character of New Zealand society that he has now been made High Commissioner to Zimbabwe.

# Letters

## Change in the Soviet Union

Sir, - Alexander Masovinnus (Letters, May 15) is surely right to criticize Archie Brown's scolding account (March 27) of the Soviet Union and its "reforms". But he fails to draw what I believe to be the two most important lessons from the text which offends him.

First, there are sovietologists who try to tell the truth about the communist system, and who recognize that it reforms itself only at the top, and only so as to perpetuate its totalitarian power. But such sovietologists (I think of the late Leonid Schapiro, and of Alain Besançon) do not enjoy those privileged relations with Russian academics, that "frank exchange of views", that access to new and interesting "information", which are offered to their more glib and more grovelling colleagues. Indeed, they are lucky if they can travel to the Soviet Union at all. And what scope for professional advancement is there for the ordinary and far-from-brilliant sovietologist, who has sacrificed his visa for the sake of mere honesty?

Second, every academic wishes to make a contribution to his subject, and to be known for some important discovery. If there were a discipline whose sole purpose were to study an unchanging needle-head, the learned journals would swell with articles reporting sudden and unforeseen increases in the number of angels found dancing upon it. So it is with sovietology, which survives and grows by noticing total transformation in a system which nevertheless remains, from year to year and decade to decade, curiously untransformed.

Mr Masovinnus should be less shocked than he is by Archie Brown's "myopia". Rather than hope for the impossible - that truth should be the sole aim of sovietology - he should reflect instead on the peculiar nature of this discipline, which has become hostage to the very system which it pretends to study.

ROGER SCRUTON,  
6 Linden Gardens, London W2.

## Towards a Science of Feeling

Sir, - In his article (May 8), B. F. Skinner reduces feeling to physiology (bodily conditions like those described by W. B. Cannon), etymology (eg, anxiety traced in part to the Latin root for choking), and then defines the role of psychology as largely a matter of contingent verbal behaviour. For example, when someone sees a downcast look on another's face and says, "You look dejected"

(or depressed), the other learns what dejection or depression feels like and how to label the feeling. However, the contingencies of reinforcement (Skinner's vernacular) of chance verbal behaviour are hardly sufficient to account for the immense variety of feelings that introspection yields - a variety that poets and patients appear readily to experience.

The key paragraph in Skinner's essay ends with the sentences: "All words for feelings seem to have begun as metaphors, and it is significant that the transfer has always been from public to private. No word seems to have originated as the name of a feeling." One wonders on what authority these categorical statements are based. Surely not on the claims of phenomenological psychologists.

In a word, one feels cheated by Skinner's behaviouristic outline of a science of feeling. There is much more to feeling than he finds room for in his pre-emptive definitions.

SAUL ROSENZWEIG,  
Department of Psychology, Washington University,  
St Louis, Missouri 63130.

## A Writers' House?

Sir, - Writers say they're unclubbable. It can't mean that they don't join clubs. They do. They are islands sharing the same unpredictable sea and they get together to talk, argue, rage and combine against the dying or the coming of anything that affects them all.

The cost of rent, rates, maintenance, staffing, etc of London club premises is prohibitive, and diversified as they are, it's money down the drain. The prospect of a Writers' House in London has been just that for doerkeys years. At one time it looked like achieving bricks and mortar, but in 1974 Lord Goodman's committee had regretfully to conclude that it would be "extremely difficult to combine the various organizations interested in the concept of a Book House".

No doubt that still applies, but it still seems like sound and diplomatic sense for the major societies to pool their resources and invest in a building in central London which their own members and visiting writers from abroad could use as a base, providing accommodation for a lecture-room, a comfortable sitting-room, offices for the managerial staff, and a small bar. Ideally there should be bedrooms for writers from out of town to put up for a night at a reasonable cost. Club members living at a distance often can't afford to come to evening meetings which will involve them in the expense of staying at hotels. Writers' House should be a club-house for writers in general.

The idea has been realized in various

## AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

- John Bayley is Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford. His *The Order of Beasts at Trafalgar and Other Essays* has just been published.
- Joseph Brodsky's collection of essays, *Less Than One*, was published last year.
- Roger Cardinal's *Bretan: Nadja* appeared last year.
- Teresa Clay has worked on a number of archaeological sites in the Mediterranean.
- Patrick Craig is co-author, with Mary Cadogan, of *The Lady Investigates: Women detectives and spies in fiction*, 1981.
- J. Mordaunt Crook's *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the picturesque to the post-modern* will be published later this year.
- Dick Davis is Northern Arts Literary Fellow at the Universities of Newcastle and Durham.
- Tim Dooley's first collection of poems, *The Interrupted Dream: Poems 1971-1984*, was published in 1985.
- Lorina Elther is Professor of History of Art at Stanford University. His *An Outline of 19th-Century European Painting, Volume 1: From David through Cézanne* will be published next month.
- Wilma George is a Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and author of *Biologist Philosopher: A study of the life and writings of Alfred Russel Wallace*, 1964. Her *Darwin*, in the Postmodern Modern Masters series, was published in 1982.
- Barbara Hardy is Professor of English Literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her books include *The Advantage of Lyric*, 1977. Her *Narrators and Novelists* will be published later this year.
- Alisdair Hume is Professor of History and Director of the Centre for Caribbean Studies at the University of Warwick.
- Geoffrey Hocking is Professor of Russian History at the School of Slavonic Studies, University of London, and author of *A History of the Soviet Union*, 1985.
- Liam Hudson is Professor of Psychology at Brunel University. His books include *Night Life: The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1985.
- Eric Korn is an antiquarian bookseller in London.
- Jack Meadows is the author of *Social Garbage: Comets, meteors and other solar-system debris*, 1986.
- Edward Norman's *The Victorian Christian Socialists* has just been published.
- Alec Noye is Economics Professor of Economics at the University of Glasgow. His *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* appeared in 1983.
- Edward O'Donoghue's *The Cairn Love Tradition* was published in 1983.
- Michael O'Neill is a lecturer in English at the University of Durham.
- John Reading's *Essential Reading* and his latest collection of poems, *Six*, were both published last year.
- Oliver Reilly's collection of poems, *Skewington's Daughter*, was published in 1985.
- David Rieuwerts is Reader in Archaeology at Edinburgh University, and the author of *L'Albo della Magna Grecia*, 1984.
- E. R. Turner's books include *Dear Old Blighty*, 1980, and *An ABC of Nostalgia*, 1984.
- John Wain has recently completed the catalogue of Samuel Pepys's Calligraphic Collection for the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge.

degrees and all sorts of ways in other countries. Toronto has Harbourfront, an amalgam of private and public interests which has made of reclaimed dockland a huge arts and recreation centre. Israel has Writers' Houses and artists' colonies; there is a Maison des Écrivains in Paris; the Alfred Döblin House in Germany was presented by Günter Grass for the benefit of his fellow-authors and there is, or was, a comprehensive draft proposal for a Writers' House in Berlin, with facilities for a bookshop, café, meeting-rooms and accommodation for visiting authors. I believe that Amsterdam has its Writers' House, and so does Hungary. London seems to be the one important city in the world of books which offers no real facilities to its own and visiting writers.

The pooling of resources could not provide a pool big enough to float a venture of this sort. Money, and how to get it, would be the second problem. The first must be to convince the leading literary bodies that there is a real intention to establish a Writers' House in London. There have been rumours that certain of the major societies are looking at the idea again. If we made enough encouraging shouts, expressed ourselves privately to club presidents and publicly in letters to the papers, we might then get together to think how to raise the cash. On a rough average, 50,000 books are published each year. Allowing for the dead, who are always with us, that's still a lot of writers. Surely we can afford a place of our own?

A. L. BARKER,  
103 Harrow Road, Cansington, Surrey.

## Minority Poets

Sir, - As the nominal author (actually co-author) of the "British and Irish Poetry" list castigated by Sylvio Kantaris in her letter (May 22), may I be allowed a small bit of umbrage? The list was designed to show the range of books published, not of poets writing. It thus repeats a social bias in favour of male, middle-class expertise. But an attempt has been made to counter that.

At the risk of sounding nit-picking, Sylvia Kantaris's sums are wrong. The total number of women represented is forty-nine, the best part of a quarter of the whole; and, although the black authors are few (a fair reflection of the published field) there are eight in all, three of them women. I can't argue on class; I suspect that the act of writing poetry puts one into the middle classes. However, it would be foolish to deny the working-class origins and allegiances of many of the poets (most notably Tony Harrison and Tom Pickard).

I would have hoped it would be of more interest that the list reflected a boom in poetry-writing, particularly in the formerly peripheralized parts of Britain; and a thriving small-press scene. Sadly, this, which I think books well for the future of poetry, has gone unnoticed.

HARRY OILONIS,  
Post Society, 21 Earls Court Square, London SW5.

## AUTHOR, AUTHOR

### Competition No 331

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than June 19. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or failing that the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesses will also be taken into consideration.

Entries, marked "Author, Author 331" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BX. The solution and results will appear on June 26.

1 Say it, no ideas but in things -  
nothing but the blank faces of the houses  
and cylindrical trees  
bent, forked by preconception and accident -

2 James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, ideas; a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it.

3 The thought beneath so slight a film -  
is more distinctly seen -  
As faces just reveal the surge -  
Or Mists - the Apennine.

## Edward Thomas

Sir, - One must charitably assume that haste and ignorance explain Kathleen Bucknell's perverse assertion, in her review of my *Edward Thomas* (February 27), that I "contend" that Edward Thomas's "Old Man" is about his "spiritual identification with the unemployed". I don't.

I argue, in some detail, that Thomas draws on William James's social phenomenology (unmentioned by Bucknell) to interpret a world with "arbitrary symbolic significance, meaning I know not what". The poem is haunted by "vulnerability and transience . . . exclusion from language and solidarity . . . absence of affiliations and affinities". It "suppresses the resonances of the prose, which links the condition of 'workless, homeless men' with that of a vagrant 'innmost true self'; but this is exactly how the symbol derives its suggestive power". "Whereas in the prose this withholding of meaning is part of the curse of a ruined Eden, in the poetry it is the very guarantee of its richness and authenticity."

Bucknell insinuates, without specifying, that I am not "careful". But what could be more carefully careless than her omission of a key sentence of my text, precisely when she is accusing me of enochronistically citing dock strikes of 1889 and 1911-13, "even though *The South Country* appeared in 1909"? The sentence offers an instance exactly matching the book's simile from only eight years previously. By ignoring this, and my discussion of Thomas's youthful admiration for John Burns, the dockers' leader (met around the time of the 1889 strike), she makes a fragile but significant association appear totally gratuitous.

I am also chided for "neglect[ing] Thomas's personal and poetic development". No one would know, without reading it, that all the details cited against my book can be culled from its long opening biographical chapter. Only someone who knew little about Thomas would refer to his "poetic development". All the experts agree there was none. Thomas's poetry sprang fully armed from his side in 1914. A more "careful" reader might have noticed my remark, apropos the first poem he wrote, "This . . . one of his finest, already contains most of his distinctive features".

"Smith founders," we are told, "partly because he fails to see that Thomas's observations of rural life are not historical records but literary works." Like almost everyone else, I had always assumed that poems are both "literary works" and "historical records", since they are written at a historical moment in a historical language, and do not drop from heaven in a shower of supervisor's recommendations. What is usually in contention is their precise mode of existence as historical records. Miss Bucknell is editing Auden's juvenilia (mostly thin on literary merit). Does she regard these primarily as "literary works" or as "historical records"?

STAN SMITH,  
Istituto di Lingue e Letterature, University of Florence, Piazza Brunelleschi 4, Florence.

### Competition No 337

Winner: E. K. Breaton

#### Answers:

1 Lynch the conductor! Jugulate the drums!  
Butcher the brass Ensanguinate the strings!  
Throttle the flutes! . . . Stravinsky's April comes  
With pitiless pomp and pain of sacred springs . . .  
Siegfried Sassoon, "Concert-Interpretation"

2 Oh curved, curved in a scroll the violin's neck and  
carved  
With concentration of the patient hand;  
And tight those springs and quick to break in the  
harsh

Air, and in the inclement weather;  
And shrill, shrill the song of the ottrings when the  
horse-hair sweeps

Caresingly upon them.  
John Heath-Stubbs, "Valse Oubliée"

3 Oint, whispering end caught from  
Vest Sunday-fall and organ-frowned-on spaces  
Beside a sudden scuttle on the drum,  
"The Queen", and huge resettling. Then begins  
A snivel on the violins:  
I think of your face among all those faces  
Philip Larkin, "Bronchitis"

John Heath-Stubbs



## COMMENTARY

## Falling down, going up

J. Mordaunt Crook

Londoners  
Museum of London, until August 2  
CELINA FOX  
Londoners  
272pp. Thames and Hudson. £20.  
0500 01409 4

London is a state of mind, and Londoners are those who share it. Administrative changes and shifts of population have long since destroyed any real sense of communal identity. But the facelessness of metropolitan society has always been its trump-card: true Londoners revel in the freedom of anonymity. So Celina Fox has set herself a pretty impossible task: to identify, in pictorial form, the historic population of the metropolis; to personalize the face of London. That she almost succeeds is a tribute to her skill as an anthropologist. With *Londoners*—both the current exhibition at the Museum of London and its accompanying book—she offers us a veritable cavalcade of images, backed up by acute, impressionistic essays.

Londoners in crowds: tumbling down Doré's "Ludgate Hill" or huddled in the murk of Henry Moore's wartime Underground; all incident and bustle in Frith's "Paddington Station"; damp, abstracted shadows in Nevinson's "Oxford Street"; flickering, lamplight ghosts in Sickert's music-hall by night—"Noctua Ambrosiana"; the Mogul Tavern, Drury Lane.

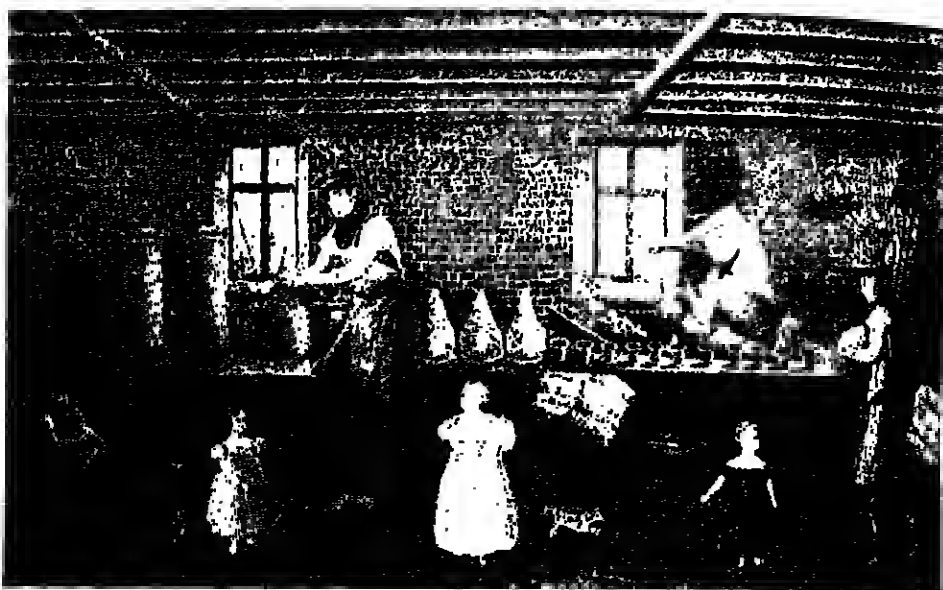
Or London on parade: strolling down the Mall, dancing in Vauxhall, gambling in St James's. The set-piece promenades are all there. But pavements rather than drawing-rooms are Dr Fox's forte: cool-heavens on Adelphi Terrace; gravel-diggers in Kensington; felons in Newgate and debtors in the King's Bench; railway navvies in Camden Town, beggars in Southwark, fish porters in Billingsgate; chimney-sweeps, mudlarks, matchgirls, shopgirls. And some of the images are memorable: Hayman's "Wapping Landlady", at ease with Jack Tar; Morland's

winsome "Lady's Maid Soaping Linen"; Harold Gilman's "Mrs Mounter at the breakfast Table"—a haunting vignette of faded gentility.

Hogarth, of course, is the metropolitan observer *par excellence*. And no anthology of this kind could leave him out, still less Hollar or Rowlandson. But there are other limners of London too, all the more striking for being less familiar. George Scharf, for instance. Whereas Shepherd celebrates the glossy results of the Prince Regent's Improvements, Scharf records the building process itself. London Bridge coming down, Hungerford Market going up; tunnelling beneath the streets for the New Fleet Sewer; laying water mains in Tottenham Court Road—wherever there's a building site, Scharf is there too: the alternative topographer of Regency London.

Such glimpses, fresh and unacknowledged, make for a good exhibition and a better book. Sponsored by Chase Manhattan Bank and designed by David Stanfield, the exhibition is elegantly crammed into half-a-dozen small "rooms", each devoted to a particular theme. The choice of themes is inevitably arbitrary: some will quibble at the omission of separate sections on theatres and sport. But the arrangement is lucid and the labelling suitably didactic. Indeed, the labels often double as captions to the text of Fox's book. There the author is well-served by her twenty colour plates: Hogarth's "Six Servants", for instance, could scarcely look brighter. But the layout leaves something to be desired: the 257 black-and-white illustrations are unnumbered; and the source of each image referred to is irritatingly inserted in brackets, instead of appearing neatly among the reference notes at the end of the book. Even so, the text reads very well.

Dr Fox's Londoners are inevitably disconnected, random products of artistic choice. But, through her artists' eyes—heroic with Frank Brangwyn; prosaic with J. T. Smith and J. C. Bourne; romantic with Ford Madox Brown; melodramatic with Géricault; apocalyptic with Doré—we sense something of the capital's vibrancy and force, and the endless multiplicity of metropolitan living.



"The Interior of George Robinson's Pottery, Brentford", a painting by an unknown artist, c 1840, from Celina Fox's *Londoners*, reviewed here.

## The Cartoonist Who...

E. S. Turner

H. M. Bateman 1887-1970: Centenary exhibitions  
Royal Festival Hall and National Theatre, until June 20  
The Best of H. M. Bateman: The "Tattler" cartoons 1922-26  
52 colour plates. Bodley Head. £11.95.  
0370 310705

H. M. Bateman's centenary should have been celebrated in that National Gallery of Humorous Art he once advocated (a possible Bateman scene there, with the artist making his appeal at the top table and well-fed potential backers fleeing for the exits). Instead, the exhibition is spread over London's South Bank, starting in the Royal Festival Hall and concluding—a few windswept puddles further on—in the National Theatre.

The captions to old *Punch* jokes were supposed to end with "Collapse of stout party", but artists did not actually portray the stout party collapsing until Bateman came along; then, in moments of high outrage, not only did all kinds of parties collapse but so did earth's foundations. In moments of lesser outrage, the population merely suffered advanced exophthalmia, or mass levitation of headgear.

No one has yet accused Bateman of indulging in the pathetic fallacy, but he certainly projected human emotions into external nature. It seems likely that he borrowed the idea from the Russo-French artist Caran d'Acho, who has a barracks scene in which buildings shake under the blast of military commands, and a street idyll in which the onset of young love sets the townsquare aquiver. It was Bateman's trick to adapt the device to heighten the humiliation of those who called the *pâté de foie gras* potted meat or addressed the *maitre d'hôtel* as "Gargon".

The exhibition reveals how precociously accomplished were Bateman's pre-1914 caricatures, mainly of stage and sporting people. He had a good line to affected pliancy and could pin down the quiddity of a chaplain, a bishop, a judge or an *agent de police* with great skill. Most of these sketches were produced before he decided to "go mad" on paper, having reputedly suffered a nervous breakdown trying to decide whether to be a serious or humorous artist. The decision once taken, he concentrated on strips, of which he was a pioneering master, and on the familiar comedies of angling, simplifying and, to some degree vulgarizing his style for the popular market (*The Humourist*, *London Opinion*, *Sunday Graphic*). His work was a bridge between the overdrawn pictures of the old *Punch* and the underdrawn "shortland" sketches of today. In a loosening-up sense, he did for comic art what Ogden Nash did for straight-jacketed light verse.

Bateman was no savage satirist and sharpened no political axe; that heartless cackling group squinting malignantly over a stump, or

tor possibly summed up his approach to change. His targets were the conventional ones of the day: the slackers of 1914, the much-mocked end-of-war OBEs, Negro music, charabanc parties, the wearers of plus-fours and Oxford bags, bossy overfed matrons, short-fused colonels (his colonels were superb) and, above all, tax inspectors. Jokes about Jews and Negroes were well received in those days; we are shown the usher disastrously announcing the Colquhouns as Cohens, but not the woman saying "I have called on behalf of the poor little knock-kneed niggers of Poopooland" (for this, see the collection *Considered Trifles*). One curiosity is "The Father Who Refused to Have His Children's Tonsils Out": the doctor who has been preparing the sacrificial tonsils does not, as one would expect, shudder with professional outrage, but capers with joy.

Two of Bateman's finest strips are generally agreed to be "The Boy Who Breathed on the Glass at the British Museum" (the Museum declined to lend the original, perhaps in case someone breathed on it) and "Getting a Document Stamped at Somerset House", in which the victims suffer the ultimate in legal and bureaucratic indignity. The jokes which became famous as "The Man Who..." very gently in their aptness; some ideas are too obvious (the bowler hat worn at Murren, the chorus girl who miscalculates, but even the misdirected and far-fetched are redeemed by the robust alchemy of the craftsmanship and the confidently rendered period detail (how different is Bateman's Lloyds from the new machine for living!) This "Man Who..." is virtually run out with the 1930s. It has been strangely suggested that there is no scope for a Bateman joke in these days of "anything goes". What about the agony of the potential juror rejected by a dithering court for looking too respectable?

In *The Best of H. M. Bateman: The "Tattler" Cartoons 1922-26* are several reminders of the decadence of our times. The steed of the Horse Guards sentry is convulsed at being offered a carrot, but that is the least of the indignities visited by tourists on sentries today. The cricketers shown indulging in antic-contortions to mark an umpire's moment of inattention are only behaving as cricketers owe do at every other ball. "The Guardsman Who Dropped It" is not in this collection, but it is relevant to point out that Guardsmen today not only drop their rifles, they themselves may be seen dropping. In a foreword Mark Boxer says that Bateman was paid £200 for these double-page *Tattler* drawings, the equivalent of a current annual stipend; not bad for a man who, as Boxer says, was never the high-life insider his drawings in the society "glossies" might suggest. Disillusion eventually overtook him and he exiled himself in Gozo. A sketch by him in the 1960s, in the Royal Festival Hall, shows a loquacious couple in a room with a Ogdon Nash did for straight-jacketed light verse. Bateman was no savage satirist and sharpened no political axe; that heartless cackling group squinting malignantly over a stump, or

## COMMENTARY

## Pick an ending, any ending

Eric Korn

The Mystery of Edwin Drood  
Savoy Theatre

Well, they didn't call it *Don't point it's Drood*. Other than that, Rupert Holmes's musical version of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* at the Savoy has few redeeming features. Strategic misjudgments and tactical blunders together produce a memorably wonky evening. The wheeze of offering a choice of endings and allowing the audience to decide which they prefer is the great innovation of the show: but what kind of a performance can an actor give that will fit as well the character of victim or villain, corpse or detective, fall guy or *deus ex machina*? The question gets you thinking about behaviourism in the theatre, about the notion of intentionality and textual closure: but don't bother. The level of discourse is *Chick's Own*, the characterization as broad and as thin as a highway poster. The subtle Crisparkle is turned into a Chasuble, the Landlesses into freaks, John Jasper into wicked Sir Jasper. The plot is likewise schematic, beyond the needs of the stage.

Another failed deconstructionist gimmick is to blame for many other stupidities. We are not seeing ambiguous events in *Cloisterham*: instead what we are seeing is *The Disappearance and Possible Death of Edwin Drood* as enacted in 1892, by the Artists of the Music Hall Royale, a talentless troupe who have reached the end of the pier. They can discuss variant interpretations, mug madly at each die, squabble, interrupt the action with their own awful jokes and reduce the little that remains of the little that remains of Dickens's

half-plot to inept farce. It could have worked: but it would have needed a script and a cast whose values were not those of the Music Hall Royale. In the expensive and rather silly souvenir brochure Rupert Holmes writes an appreciation of the *The Music Hall* that contains most of the populist clichés, without saying that it was usually bad, boring and ill-natured. There is also a self-indulgent note on how he came to write the musical, which is entitled "What the Dickens!"

The cast are not Dickensians either. Emie Wise doubling (apparently a last-minute hitch) as Chairman and as Thomas Sapsea is unflattering but unfunny; Lulu, on hand to turn the haggard old dopeoater Princess Puffer into that stage stereotype, the Jolly Old Bawd, is raucous; Julia Hills as Edwin Drood is ingeniously cast and spirited without extravagance.

The music seemed derivative and forgettable. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is often good to look at. There are witty backdrops, bits of stage machinery that gave me a child's delight, and a spectacular way with dry ice to produce a steaming dinner, a horror movie vapour (what you might call a hamster) for the graveyard, and a tremendous thundering train arrival. What that Dickens says "In those days there was no railway to *Cloisterham*, and Mr Sapsea said there never would be?" Who is Dickens and what does he know? There is a cheerfully erotic opium ballet with Rops-damned spirits writhing all over—perhaps the real reason for straining Dickens through 1890s muslin—and other visual pleasures, especially for theatregoers who don't object to the assumption that the theatre is a place for men to be entertained by looking at women.

You wouldn't then expect this show to cast

any light on who did it, and what it was; nor does it. Anyway, the fix was in: in what Ernie Wise gaspingly called "a daring and dangerously democratic move", the cast and not the audience was allowed to decide the question-begging issue of whether Drood were alive or dead. They voted him dead and then... but I'm not giving anything away, because the night you go, if you do, there will be an alternative and equally ill-considered ending.

*Drood* had the virtue of sending me back to Dickens. Dickens, I was not surprised to be reminded, was funnier. Dickens creates the ineffable Mr Honeythunder, the zealously intolerant reformer, cut from the play along with Mr Grengious and Miss Twinkleton and Mr Tartar and the Billickin, several of whom might have had some part in the solution. Dickens has a description of bottles in a larder that is funnier than anything Rupert Holmes could come up with. Above all, Dickens does not say "They call it the Nuns' House because there's none of this and none of that and not much of the other", or "My wife's one in a million? Won in a raffle more like", or any of the other I say-I say-I say that didn't have the audience in stitches.

I don't have a theory about Drood, though when I do, it will not neglect, as many previous interpretations do, the Poppian dogma that predictions (and likewise reconstructions) ignore the unpredictable: the last-minute emergence of a new character or a resuscitated ancient one is all too likely. Moreover, I think there is a lot of mysterious parentage to be accounted for. "Who exactly was Rosa Bud?" I heard someone ask on the way out, and her companion, who may have been dozing, answered, "That's easy. Didn't she turn out to be a sledge?"

## Jolly justice

Patricia Craig

Strong Poison: Have His Carcase;  
Gaudy Night  
BBC2

Agatha Christie's Miss Marple recently found perfect embodiment in the actress Joan Hickson, and now a similar service has been performed for the two leading Dorothy L. Sayers characters, Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane. Edward Petherbridge and Harriet Walter are a delight in the parts in BBC2's set of Sayers dramatizations, looking and sounding absolutely spot-on, whether they're capering about like a Wodehouse duo, or facing up bravely to upsetting circumstances.

In the opening case, *Strong Poison*, which is pretty closely to the plan of the 1930 novel of that title, the two meet for the first time in Holloway Prison, where Harriet is awaiting trial on the charge of having admitted arsenic to her ex-lover Philip Boyes, an avant-garde novelist and something of a pain in the neck. Harriet Vane is a writer of detective novels, like her creator, with whom she shares other attributes. Lord Peter is a high-bred sleuth who first drew the attention of the public by solving the mystery of a body in a bath (*Whose Body?*, 1923). In *Strong Poison*, all his energies are applied to the problem of establishing the innocence of Harriet, whom he hopes to marry, despite scant encouragement from the girl, who, indeed, has other matters on her mind.

The one of all three television adaptations is neither frivolous and debonair, even when Harriet is being beastly to Lord Peter; she only does it, we know, because of the rotten position she is being obliged to feel grateful to him, of all things, for saving her bacon. Save it he does by uncovering a forged will and some murky testimony, and putting his finger on the murderer's surefire method—a matter of getting his system accustomed to arsenic, which enables him to share without ill effect the lethal poison prepared for his victim.

Harriet is duly acquitted, goes on a walking holiday to revive her spirits, wearing a sensible outfit and promptly stumbles on a corpse on a path. *Have His Carcase* (dramatized in

four parts by Rosemary Anne Sisson) now being under way. The seashore is attached to an imaginary watering-place called Wilvercombe, from one of whose hotels a professional male dancer is missing. This bearded ballroom dancer of Russian extraction, whose chaf-trait is gullibility, has got himself entangled, it turns out, with a rich woman considerably older than himself (a Mrs Weldon, well played by Rowena Cooper). As in *Strong Poison*, a jeopardized inheritance is at the root of all the jiggy-pokery. Sayers's scenario allows some scope for egregious characterization; she didn't take a great deal of trouble over the minor figures in her stories, drawing them, when needed, from a somewhat old-hat assembly. Still, the quaint behaviour of such characters contributes to the decorative, bygone quality of the whole undertaking.

We find an increase in effectiveness as the series progresses. *Have His Carcase* has the edge on the opening serial as far as efficiency of puzzle-making is concerned (though *Strong Poison*, in the hands of the adaptor Philip Bradley and the series director Christopher Hodson, has much to recommend it, including good performances from Shirley Calh as the ladylike detective Miss Climpson, and Norma Stender as her sturdy employee Miss Murchison, who isn't above relishing a spot of law-breaking in the interests of justice). The title, the victim's gore; the intermittently farouche behaviour of Harriet Vane and the hangman's noose notwithstanding, *Have His Carcase* is a very jolly affair indeed, with Harriet and Lord Peter up to the eyebrows in the deciphering of coded letters, and puzzling their brains over symptoms of hysteria in a horse.

*Gaudy Night*, even though it has shed a fair number of subplots during its transfer to the television screen, remains the most compelling of the Harriet Vane adventures. It is set in an Oxford College, Shrewsbury (Somerville), on which the author of the novel casts a cordial eye. She comes down firmly on the side of an academic life for women, though there are moments in the narrative when it seems as if a contrary ideology is being upheld. Shrewsbury College is suffering under an outbreak of poison pen letters and graffiti, and the members of the Senior Common Room are driven to wondering if there is something, after all, in

the quasi-psychological objection to women's education (1935 is the date of the novel). Has too much learning, combined with seclusion and celibacy, driven one of them completely round the bend? They can't help looking askance at one another. The Dean of Shrewsbury (Carol Maccready) invites Harriet, a former student there, to look into the business, and, with a good deal of help from Lord Peter, she clears the lot of them of the charge of criminal instability. A powerful anti-feminist motive, in fact, is at the bottom of the Shrewsbury disturbances.

Professional integrity is the crux of the matter. One of the Research Fellows, a Miss de Vine (Dilys Hamlett), had, in the past, exposed some falsification on the part of a historian (male) who subsequently shot himself, leaving a note to the effect that he'd been driven to it by a crowd of harpies. "You broke him and killed him..." Do you think that's a woman's job?" demands the Shrewsbury "ghost", once she is exposed. The Research Fellow, in this adaptation, is unaccountably deprived of her best line, which follows this outburst: "Most unhappily," said Miss de Vine, "it was my job."

*Gaudy Night* goes in for antics rather than ethics (Harriet, for example, is knocked senseless rather more frequently than she is in the novel), which results in a shift of emphasis from Sayers's feminist issue to the puzzle-solving aspect of the plot. It is, however, rich in atmosphere and continuously diverting. It ends with the impassive face of Bunter, Lord Peter's manservant—played by Richard Morant who brings a touch of enigma to a relationship portrayed by Dorothy L. Sayers with a good deal of music-hall preposterousness.

The June issue of the *Fiction Magazine* contains a special feature, "Getting into Print", in which fourteen writers, mainly novelists, answer such questions as "How long have you been submitting your first novel for publication?", "Did you have an agent?" etc. Most appear to have been lucky first time, but David Storey's *This Sporting Life* was rejected by fifteen publishers. Copies are available (£2, including postage) from: 12/13 Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1.

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Peter Winch



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# Psychical substrata

Roger Cardinal

LOUIS ARAGON  
*La Défense de l'Infant et Les Aventures de Jean-Foutre la Bête*  
Edited by Eduardo Ruiz  
377pp. Paris: Gallimard, 95fr.  
2070707938  
The Librarian  
Translated by Jo Levy  
185pp. Calder/New York: RiverRun. £11.95.  
0714541014

It remains one of the enigma of Aragon's career that he should, in October 1927, have destroyed the novel he had been working on for four years: *La Défense de l'Infant* – burning some 1,500 manuscript pages, as he later claimed, under the eyes of his mistress Nancy Cunard, on the floor of a cold hotel in Madrid, while a servant peered through the keyhole wondering what the two of them could be up to.

The received explanation for Aragon's sacrifice has been that he did it under pressure from the anti-literary consensus of the Surrealist group, just as he had given up his editorship of the literary *Paris-Journal* in 1923, and had in May 1927 countersigned the tract which formally excluded Artaud and Soupault for having betrayed Surrealism in pursuing "l'insupportable aventure littéraire". André Breton's attack on the novel form in the 1924 *Manifeste* seemingly established a generic bias for Surrealist writ-

ing, whereby the novel is associated with bourgeois careerism, and only poetry remains as the medium of authentic creativity and liberation.

I have never found this differentiation other than crude, nor is the implication as to Aragon's motives at all satisfactory. For one thing, there were always Surrealists around who managed to be novelists without incurring the group's wrath. If in 1926 René Crevel could publish the formally quite conventional novel *La Mort difficile*, what was in principle so objectionable about what Aragon was doing? For another, it is clear that Aragon's seeming submission to a Surrealist "line" did not prevent his carrying on writing the book, even if he consented not to publish it. Moreover, whereas the release of two excerpts in a non-Surrealist journal under the heading *Le Cahier noir* did provoke negative comment within the group, there seems to have been no outcry when *Le Cou d'Irène*, another long fragment, came out as an independent volume (admittedly anonymously). No, the reasons for Aragon's *nuto-da-fé* were other, as he himself later hinted, having less to do with the Surrealists and their collective criteria than with his own private standards.

What exactly comprises the present gathering of the extant remains, scrupulously edited by Eduardo Ruiz from manuscripts in private hands and from scripts hitherto kept locked at the Fonds Doucet? Here is a reprint – with lascivious illustrations by Masson – of the semi-erotic novella *Irène* (now definitively ascribed

to Aragon, despite the quaint disavowals of his lifetime): a pornographic grotesque called *Les Aventures de Jean-Foutre la Bête*; a fuller version of *Le Cahier noir*; and a number of other pieces, amounting in all to some 240 printed pages. An informed guess computes this as totalling 15 to 20 per cent of the original novel.

In one of his gnomic commentaries on *La Défense* in later life, Aragon described the work as "le comble et la négation du roman", a fiction crammed with hundreds of characters who live out divergent adventures until the orgasmic finale, when they all converge in a gigantic brothel scene.

The remnant most in keeping with the model of narrative multiplication is the sequence "Voyageurs", whose separate chapters introduce characters – Anne, Armand, Gérard, Michel – who are briefly glimpsed, then vanish, sometimes to reappear pages later in an entirely new context. Only a few – the manipulative Blanche, the unaccommodating Irène – survive long enough for the reader to register them as decisive presences.

What makes most impact is the recurrence of certain set-pieces in the author's repertoire, such as the scenes of exacerbated and anonymous desire, often set in public places: one of Aragon's most fetching pieces of erotica is a passage from "Instants" which evokes a triple orgasm in a crowded carriage on the Nord-Sud metro line. Another typical scene discloses what I take to be the actual circumstances of composition: a writer lounges at a café table and orders a *fine* while transcribing details of the world around him, as Aragon was indeed wont to do. This scene fits by from time to time, a reminder of the vanity of trying to copy reality, since in point of fact what Aragon is really doing is drawing the reader into deeper and deeper convolutions of textuality.

The reader – by turns tantalized, patronized, mocked even – must finally realize what this so-called "novel" is all about. It is about writing, or at least about style. We recognize the personae that Aragon has perfected. There is the Wildean dandy, abrupt and cocksure master of the mordant insult; and the Jarryesque defender of his own genius, as in the caustic "Je te déteste, univers", which rails against the impertinent judgments of the narrator's cretinous friends (unpublished in Aragon's lifetime, this text could be construed as evidence of Aragon's scorn for his colleagues). Then there is the Sadean libertine, ever ready to impute lubricious potential to the most decorous of females; and finally the Roussellian wordsmith, the virtuoso improviser upon the stuff of language: alliterative arabesque are spun around arbitrary keywords like *funeste* or

*pérépète*, wild sentences are engendered out of anagrams like *onagrelorange*, and crazy fairy-tales are peppered with such brusque Ducassian similes as "un rire bleu, bizarre comme l'allumette" or "le foudre, pareil aux neiges des sommets", images at once essentially Surrealist and flamboyantly distinctive.

From time to time "novelistic" concerns do surface in Aragon's lyrical prose: jealousy, anger, the effect of crowds, the thrill of illicit passion. These lend a certain colour to the predominantly urban setting, yet they hardly construct what one would spontaneously label a "novel", let alone "realist fiction", at least not in the terms one would have thought appropriate in the mid-1920s. Truth to tell, if Aragon was writing something "novelistic", his endeavour, on this evidence, was more to explode the conventions of a lingering Naturalism, and to initiate an onerous illumination of the substrata of the city consciousness (a pioneering ambition not without some affinity to that of Jules Romains or of some *nouveau romanciers*).

Certainly there is much to enjoy and admire in these vestiges of a work never completed. On the other hand, the bitterness and waywardness of the texts point to a simpler explanation of Aragon's renunciation. Almost certainly he did not destroy the novel in deference to a group diktat. Nor did he, in my estimation, do so because of Nancy Cunard's alleged squeamishness about erotic literature, given that he blithely published *Le Cou d'Irène* a few months later. An obvious answer, I suggest, is that Aragon simply found it all too much. Fifteen hundred brilliant pages do not necessarily add up to a unified whole: maybe this writer so proud of his faultless first drafts got cold feet at the prospect of an extensive rewrite.

A more modest and therefore more satisfying volume is *Le Libertinisme* (1924), admirably translated by Jo Levy as *The Libertine*. This compendium of early pieces includes "Extra Special", a pastiche in homage to Aragon's hero Isidore Ducasse; "In a Tight Spot", a bitter play somewhat in the vein of H.K. Lenormand; "When the Game's Up", the tale of an anarchist gang, half thriller, half send-up of the Surrealist clan; and "The French Woman", an exercise in erotic innuendo and fine example of Aragon's talent for rendering intimate events from a woman's standpoint. The evidence of such a text alone might suggest that Aragon never liked to be in less than total control of his work. It would be ironic if *La Défense de l'Infant* were burned not because it was anti-Surrealist, but because it was, for Aragon's taste, too capricious, too formless, too anarchic, in a word too surrealist.

## The drama of loneliness

Mansel Stimpson

JEAN COCTEAU  
*The Miscreant*  
Translated by Dorothy Williams  
163pp. Brilliance Books. Paperback, £3.95.  
0 946189 91 9

In his first novel, dating from 1921, Jean Cocteau refers to our perceptions on waking: "We see a dreadful universe, because we see right. Sooo afterwards we are loaded with the tricks of the intellect." Those tricks are just what Cocteau's detractors deplore, finding them in, for example, the determinedly idiosyncratic style which marks the beginning and end of *The Miscreant*. Certainly the interest of the book stems from the fact that there is a good deal of Cocteau himself in the central figure, the student Jacques Forestier ("He exaggerated his weak points, mannerisms and ridiculous ways until they were no longer liabilities. He deliberately brought them out.")

But the strength of the novel, now republished in paperback (in a translation by Dorothy Williams dating from 1958), lies elsewhere. Some would locate it in the evocation of a Parisian life long past and, admittedly, there are phrases which could come from no other era – as in this description of Veronica: "By night, she is an amorous negress lying down in her bath with bar tawdry jewels." But despite the Cubist parallel suggested by Serrin Thirkell in her introduction, it is the book's universal quality which engages us: its persuasive account

of Jacques's first physical love affair, with the revue artist Germaine, and his discovery that sexual behaviour is far too complex not to contradict the dreams of an adolescent. As a fellow student puts it: "Moral laws are the rules of a game at which everyone cheats, and has done so since the beginning of the world." This is not the Cocteau we know best, but Cocteau who can still assert: "A mirror is not Narcissus' pool; there is no plunging into it." Indeed this is a work in which Cocteau's cleverness is not on the surface but in the compellingly detailed insights into relationships. Theso open out from the central one (he judged only in the episode of Jacques's suicide bid, when Cocteau tries too hard) to a superbly revealed sexual merry-go-round which his Murdoch might envy.

The moment when the affair between Jacques and Germaine passes its peak is brilliantly treated, the couple clashing over the effectiveness of a poem by Victor-Hugo. The adolescent world – recognizable and timeless – is so well realized that *The Miscreant* may seem quite unconnected with what was to come. But Cocteau himself corrects that in the preface: "my whole work hangs on the drama of love, and man's attempts to overcome it." The very real difference is that here we have Cocteau at the moment of waking.

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# A legacy of independence

Lorenz Eitner

EUGÈNE DELACROIX  
*The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A critical catalogue, 1832-1863*  
Volumes Three and Four  
700pp. 341 plates. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
1986.  
019323784

Surprisingly, Delacroix has to this day escaped the deconstructive vengeance that has overtaken Courbet, Manet, and many other artists of the face of it, seem less troublingly complex than he, and therefore less attractive to imaginative interpreters. One might have thought that the mystery surrounding his personality would have stimulated the Freudianism, and to initiate an onerous illumination of the substrata of the city consciousness (a pioneering ambition not without some affinity to that of Jules Romains or of some *nouveau romanciers*).

Delacroix's early years, 1816-31. Volumes Three and Four, issued this spring, comprise the easel paintings of his mid and late career, 1832-63. Still to appear, Volume Five will treat the great mural cycles and their preparatory sketches. Johnson concentrates exclusively on the paintings and replaces Robaut's emphasis on the biographical continuity of the work with a complex system of subdivisions that deliberately cuts across the chronology of his volumes. His purpose is not to trace the development but to define the actual composition of the work, and he therefore distinguishes, and lists separately, three main categories of paintings: those which he believes to be authentic (a total of 342 for the period of 1832-63), those which are unlocated or lost (ninety-eight), and those which he considers as doubtful, or rejects outright (thirty-five). Within these categories, the paintings are further subdivided by the subject matter – "Historical and Literary Subjects", "North African and Eastern Subjects", "Religious Paintings", etc – and it is only in these subcategories that they are arranged by date. This somewhat austere systematic treatment sacrifices biographical and stylistic connections to clarity of arrangement, to keeping with the catalogue's function as an instrument of reference.

Yet despite its rigorous factuality, or perhaps because of it, this catalogue is highly readable. Its light, unobstructive framework gives more immediate access to the concrete reality of works and artist than do other, more opaque forms of art-writing. With a reserve worthy of his favourite artist, Johnson spares his readers the introductory text which authors often use for an expansive disclosure of their aims and opinions. Instead, he briskly starts Volumes One and Two of his catalogue with a chronological table, and then goes directly to the main business. Volumes Three and Four are prefaced, perhaps as a concession to custom, by a literary portrait of Delacroix that he has distilled from contemporary accounts, avoiding with typical discretion some of the more intimate aspects of the artist's personal life.

The pleasures of the catalogue are in its eclecticism, many of them miniature monographs, written in an unhurried, lucid style. Johnson conveys his information by a seemingly effortless, but actually carefully shaped narrative, in which the facts and documents that he has brought together are made to speak for themselves. Even the catalogue's formidable machinery of provenances, exhibition records and bibliographies, triumphs of scholarly industry which frame the main texts of the entries, gain a vivid picturesqueness from the sheer density and colour of their detail.

The thirty-year span which Volumes Three and Four cover, extending from Delacroix's return to France after his African voyage, in 1832, to his death in 1863, was less rich in stellar Salon performances than his early years. His continuous occupation with large mural projects deflected some of his energies and left him less time for the easel paintings with which he had made his reputation. All the more astonishing are the vast range and imaginative power of the paintings that he did submit to the Salons during this period, beginning with "Women of Algiers in their Apartment" (1834), "Talliebourg" (1837), and "Medea" (1838).

the most recent Delacroix literature, notably the important series of articles published by Lee Johnson over the past twenty-five years, read like fragmentary contributions towards a future *catalogue raisonné*, merely waiting to be fitted together.

That such a catalogue should now appear, presenting the whole of Delacroix's painted work fully documented, annotated, and illustrated, therefore comes as the expected result of a long development – and perhaps as its conclusion, for it is hard to imagine much further progress, except in minutiae, along paths now so well explored. Professor Johnson's *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix*, at any rate, seems unlikely to be superseded in the near future, and may well be destined for a useful life as long as that of Robaut's seminal catalogue. Vastly richer in content and far more precise in method than any of its predecessors, its five volumes are divided into three main parts. The first two (reviewed in the TLS of July 15, 1983) deal with the paintings of Delacroix's early years, 1816-31. Volumes Three and Four, issued this spring, comprise the easel paintings of his mid and late career, 1832-63. Still to appear, Volume Five will treat the great mural cycles and their preparatory sketches. Johnson concentrates exclusively on the paintings and replaces Robaut's emphasis on the biographical continuity of the work with a complex system of subdivisions that deliberately cuts across the chronology of his volumes. His purpose is not to trace the development but to define the actual composition of the work, and he therefore distinguishes, and lists separately, three main categories of paintings: those which he believes to be authentic (a total of 342 for the period of 1832-63), those which are unlocated or lost (ninety-eight), and those which he considers as doubtful, or rejects outright (thirty-five). Within these categories, the paintings are further subdivided by the subject matter – "Historical and Literary Subjects", "North African and Eastern Subjects", "Religious Paintings", etc – and it is only in these subcategories that they are arranged by date. This somewhat austere systematic treatment sacrifices biographical and stylistic connections to clarity of arrangement, to keeping with the catalogue's function as an instrument of reference.

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approaches stand opposed to one another: the intuitive diagnostic expertise of the connoisseur, based on long practical experience, but incapable of objective proof, and the historian's demonstration of documentary evidence, more verifiable, but possible only when such evidence can be found, by luck or effort. Both methods, the "soft" and the "hard", have strong advocates, neither guarantees success or is sufficient by itself. The connoisseur's conviction is, obviously, fallible, but so is, perhaps less obviously, the historian's roading of the herd evidence. In the attribution of poorly documented work, the connoisseur's eye is often the only resource, and even seemingly well-documented works may fail to persuade, if they look wrong to the connoisseur. Art historians, or, rather, that minority among them who concern themselves with the fundamental establishment of an artist's work, will generally lean toward one or the other side in this dispute, which may be basically a matter of temperament and disposition, as well as of visual intelligence. Johnson is pre-eminently a master of documentary research, who approaches undocumented paintings with scepticism and is reluctant to venture positive attributions on the grounds of style and quality alone. In unravelling conflicting claims, he tends to opt for the side better supported by such concrete evidence as sales records, exhibition catalogues and dealers' inventories, and to rely on stylistic or qualitative indications mainly to confirm his negative judgments. It is in his rejections that he expresses connoisseurial observations, in terms such as "brushwork sufficiently lacking vitality", "crude bonding", "lacklustre quality", and "dry, timid, stentorian brushwork". This is not to say that he is indifferent to larger stylistic issues. His earlier studies of Delacroix's use of colour and frequent observations scattered throughout these volumes prove his interest and the acuteness of his eye. But for the purpose of this catalogue, purely stylistic considerations take second place, as is clear from its overall organization which rather plays down stylistic relationships.

In Volume One of the catalogue, Johnson had listed eighty-one paintings as "doubtful", specifying that on ten of these he had not yet entirely made up his mind, that five were too badly mutilated to be accepted, that twenty-one were in his opinion not authentic, but offered some room for argument, while a further forty-five paintings could only be rejected outright. Since these outcasts included a number of well-known and highly regarded paintings, not a few of which have their listing in Robaut and their place in the literature, the rejections caused a stir, but they produced no rebuttals in print. In an appendix to the present Volume Three, only two of the dis-attributed paintings are reinstated. It is noteworthy, however, that although the number of paintings listed in this latest volume is more than double the number of pictures in Volume One, only thirty-five are listed as doubtful or rejected. The reason given by Johnson is that "paintings from a famous artist's maturity . . . are more easily identified as authentic than works from his formative years". But it is also apparent that a slightly less strict standard has been applied in the matter of outright rejections. By way of compensations, a new subcategory of "School Works" is now introduced, consisting of too paintings attributed wholly or in part to Pierre Andrieu who, in Delacroix's later years, worked as his studio assistant and frequently under-painted, finished or simply copied his master's pictures. To the same Andrieu, Johnson also attributes several of the pictures that in his latest volume he lists as rejected or doubtful. Nearly all these questioned or discarded works, it may be noted, had been catalogued by Robaut. It is possible that some reinstatements or corrections will be made in the future, but it appears doubtful, given Johnson's solid documentary basis, that their number will be significant.

Studies of the work of great artists so complete in scope and profound in penetration as this require an investment of self that few are willing to make: they are therefore extremely rare. The publication of Professor Johnson's catalogue of Delacroix's paintings is an event whose impact will be felt in all futuro study of Delacroix, and hence of nineteenth-century art.

Johnson's catalogue not only brings to light paintings long lost or never adequately published, but contributes much to the knowledge of key works – paintings so often studied and so much published that one might have supposed that there was nothing further to say about them. His additions and corrections are so numerous and so pervasive, down to the minutiae of measurements and physical condition, as to constitute a massive revision of the literature on Delacroix. The entries for nearly all paintings, the relatively minor as well as the most important, thoroughly identify their subject matter, its historical or literary sources, and its significance at the time. They describe the biographical circumstances that gave rise to them and influenced their development. Where possible, they trace the genesis of paintings from sketch to final execution, chronicle the circumstances of their acceptance or rejection by the Salon, and analyse the treatment they received from the critical press. Their stylistic or technical peculiarities receive a thorough discussion (a notable instance being Delacroix's handling of highlights and half-shadows in the "Entry of the Crusaders"), as do the traces of artistic influence or of pictorial tradition that appear in them. For the most part, Johnson lets the documents speak and makes his points not by assertion but through quotations from contemporary sources, particularly from the correspondence of Delacroix himself.

Like that of most important artists of the nineteenth century, the work of Delacroix has acquired a fringe of spurious attributions that blurs its contours and dilutes its quality. Johnson wields a sharp knife in removing those accretions, some of which have gained respectability through their inclusion in important exhibitions and in the literature. He is regarded as a restrictionist, a severe judge who would rather condemn a picture with some arguable claim to acceptance than risk accepting a spurious work to the canon. This is an area in which the interests of scholarship and ownership intersect, and sometimes come into vehement collision, exposing the art historian to the pressures of a commercial world in which attributions are translatable into money. Museums, collectors, and dealers are, understandably, sensitive about the treatment their possessions receive in scholarly publications, especially in influential, long-lasting works of reference. Scholars, on their part, knowing that theirs is an uncertainty, are generally mindful of the special responsibility that their ability to inflict financial damage imposes on them, though they also know that this must not away their judgment.

In the debate over the best method for separating the authentic from the spurious in an artist's work, recently brought to wide public attention by the Rembrandt controversy, and

John Co 1316



# The battle for deaf souls

Liam Hudson

**HARLAN LANE**  
*When the Mind Hears: A history of the deaf*  
 537pp. New York: Random House.  
 distributed in the UK by Souvenir Press.  
 £18.95.  
 0394 508785

Harlan Lane's history of the deaf poses distinctive problems, the perennial ones of the historian in a new and disquieting guise. A specialist in the psychology of language, Professor Lane provides an account that is plainly expert but equally plainly partisan. It is not just that he is in favour of the deaf, as we all must be, and is committed to their acceptance as ordinary human beings. He believes, passionately, that one approach to the education of the deaf is correct, and another is so profoundly wrong as very nearly to be wicked. The history he offers, then, is a polemic in favour of one educational régime against a rival. The souls of men and women are being fought for, he suggests. He therefore feels entitled, within the bounds of scholarly evidence, to catch our attention however he can. He is willing to dramatize, and he engages too in literary conceits, impersonating the voice of one of the great protagonists in the battle, the Frenchman Laurent Clerc.

All this could have been done by legend, as Norman Mailer did, for instance, for Gary Gilmore in *The Executioner's Song*. However, Lane chooses to be explicit. In his foreword, he spells out his terms:

Even if we could write history as documentation, we should not. If there is truth to Hegel's claim that "people and governments have never learned anything from history", this should motivate the historian who wants to have an impact on human affairs, as I do, to write in a way that commands general attention. If his subject, moreover, turns on sustained outrages against fundamental human values, as mine does, is he to deny his humanity and pretend indifference?

Lane's account of these outrages fits a pattern that is instantly recognizable:

The history of relations between the society of hearing-speaking people and the community of deaf-signing people is an excellent case study in the motives and means at work when fear of diversity leads majorities to oppress minorities. The attempt to force assimilation, to claim biological insufficiency when assimilation fails, to indoctrinate minority children in majority values through the schools - all this and much more will be familiar to readers interested in the predicament of other minority communities. In short, *When the Mind Hears* is a study in the anatomy of prejudice.

"The hearing loss of most members of the signing community", Lane goes on, "has proven disastrous for them because it has played into the hands of those who seek to dispose of social problems by medicalizing them." The two million Americans who use manual language are not handicapped in the usual sense:

There is largely a problem of overcoming language barriers, not a problem of disability. So say my deaf friends, and the evidence bears them out. Then why do we hearing people consider the deaf disabled, defective? Why do we and our institutions class them not with groups such as Spanish-speaking Americans but with groups such as blind Americans? Why indeed?

The villains of the piece are the "oralists", those who believe that the spoken language is paramount and that the deaf should be taught not to sign but to lip-read and, however awkwardly, to speak. The villainy of the oralists, centuries old, is now united with that of educationalists who believe in "mainstreaming". That is to say, those who encourage the deaf to find their way in ordinary schools rather than being hived off, a race apart, in special schools. The conceptual weapons in play here - fear of diversity, the forcible assimilation of a minority through the agency of the schools, the spurious appeal to biology, the medicalization of social problems - could have been borrowed from any of thousands of tracts written over the past twenty years in defence of one beleaguered minority or another: the schizophrenic against the sane, the deviant against the police man, homosexuals against heterosexuals, blacks against whites, families against males. Fuelled their use is a sense of natural justice outraged and rights to self-determination denied. Lane concludes his preliminary argument by quoting the deaf orator Robert P. Westcott, school principal and first president

of the National Association of the Deaf:

The utmost extreme to which tyranny can go when its mailed hand descends upon a conquered people is the proscription of their natural language, and with the utmost rigor several generations are required to eradicate it. But all the attempts to suppress signs, wherever tried, have most signally failed. After a hundred years of proscription in Germany and Austria, they still flourish, and will continue to flourish to the end of time. What heinous crime have the deaf been guilty of that their language should be proscribed?

As one reads *When the Mind Hears*, the profound consolation for deaf children of learning to sign fluently, and of living in a community of those who sign, becomes unmistakable. They blossom. One sees, too, how dangerous to the deaf must be the prejudice in favour of words; failure to grasp that a sizeable proportion of the world's most fastidious inhabitants communicate most subtly with one another not through words but through shapes and colours, bodily movement and sound - through the visual arts, dancing and mime, music. There are many (one thinks of the "dyslexic" designer and jazz musicians in the Charlie Parker mould) who are largely incoherent without pencil or musical instrument in hand. Such polemic exerts its characteristic bind, though. If, however subliminally, the reader starts to "what if" and "but", he is immediately trapped. He is himself an oppressor of minorities, or he is the victim of indoctrination. Either way, his what if-ing and but-ing can be nothing but the expression of false consciousness. He is in an arena of debate from which the middle ground has been removed.

Thaw

It was a pure world, snow-covered.

I was working on an algebraic model of the long fall, almost aleatory, of flakes intersected by sifting and sweeping gusts when the phone rang:

the Radio Committee boss going bazurkas because the Friend of Children had tuned into Yudina playing the Mozart 23rd and wanted the record of it.  
 Who was the boss to say it was a live broadcast? If the Great Gardener thought it was a record, it was a record: If Stalin said shit, you shit.

So off they went to Archives to find Yudina had never recorded the 23rd. We had to do it then. That night.

The studio was frigid bedlam; the tympanist was still in his pyjamas; the woodwind had no scores - so, out of habit, were falling back on the '1812' while the conductor was so nervous his adagio kept twitching into allegro.

Yudina was the only calm one; when I swore at a fuse blowing she said 'You're far from God, you must be closer to God.'

We made the pressing at daybreak: just one copy. Three of us took it over to Dispatch like a bomb disposal squad with Parkinson's. Snow huffed and puffed at us all the way; it was 16 below and we were sweating. Carrying it, I felt limp and giggly; I remembered the Latin *effetus* weakened by having brought forth young.

That record was on the turntable in his dacha when the Great Railway Engineer finally died; the music at an end, allegro assai, whirling outer air configured with flakes and the still pulse inside tightening at 78 revolutions a minute.

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OLIVER REYNOLDS

I am not at all sure that one really wants history written in this way. It is plain that the deaf deserve advocacy. There is an oddly unfashionable cause. We tend to neglect those who stand at a physical rather than a psychological or ethnic disadvantage: not just the deaf, but the blind, the paraplegic, the epileptic, the mentally subnormal. But, as with all such groups, questions of common humanity, natural justice and the right to self-determination by no means exhaust the pool of pertinent questions that can be aired. Nor need it necessarily be an exercise in covert oppression or academic pettifoggery to air them. Can it really be the case that one educational régime, the use of one form or another of sign language, has everything in its favour, while its rival, "oralism", belongs in the blackest pit? And is it actually to the advantage of all deaf children - every single one - to live in a community which signs, rather than being attached, however peripherally, to society at large; to go to special schools rather than ordinary ones?

The evidence from other facets of upbringing and education suggests caution. Wherever one looks, one finds evidence of cycles in attitude and practice, and of passionate convictions subject to rhythmic alternation. Over the feeding of babies from bottle or breast, and the teaching of sighted children to read (whether phonetically or by "look and say"), and in our preoccupation more generally with skills and disciplines as opposed to children's creativity and self-expression, one sees cycles in operation. The same holds for psychological research - the waxing and waning, for instance,

of our interest in heritability. At each turn of the wheel, one sees the same passions, the same division of actors into the right-minded and the alien; just the qualities, in fact, that *When the Mind Hears* betrays.

What is so strange about such cycles, beyond our inability to learn from them, is the depth to which they invade our sense of what is "natural". In the years immediately after the Second World War, to take a famous instance, it struck many enlightened people as perfectly sensible for B. F. Skinner - under whom, incidentally, Lane did his PhD - to bring up his baby daughter in a box. Today, this venture strikes most enlightened people as warped as an act of inhumanity that must lead to gross psychiatric disturbance. What is so intriguing about such episodes is that, when the climate of received wisdom changes, their details become ones which few of us can bring ourselves to examine: that the box was in fact a kitchen-conditioned crib, for example, and that the gross long-term consequences for Miss Skinner seem to have been non-existent. Cynically, it is sometimes argued that such rhythmic cycles of belief about child-raising and education exist because each generation of parents and teachers, in order to perform their tasks with vim, must see themselves in righteous revolt against the errors of the previous generation. What is at issue is not this method or that, but the commitment and enthusiasm of the person using either.

Such cynicism is probably too tidy to accommodate the facts about the education of the deaf. One looks, nevertheless, at moments in near-desperation, for evidence in Lane's text that the bedrock of inherent plausibility is still recognizably present. You wish this immensely well-informed man would lower his voice for a moment, give the dramatic effect, rest, and talk to you ordinarily. There is a reason - you concede it readily - in which the deaf American is like the Spanish-speaking American. And it does make sense to see sign language as a natural language in its own right rather than being, like Braille, parasitic on normal language. But why is Lane apparently so eager to obscure what is so obviously true, namely, that deafness is exactly like blindness in that both are physiological, "medical" handicaps?

The pat answer, the one that every science student in the world knows (and which she/he cannot articulate it), is that it is responsibility to dismantle, sanitize and compose the language of vulgar prejudice. But if you allow the deaf to be called "defective", as adventurers extended their journeys into the unknown they required more reliable tools. But doesn't the academic have a responsibility? - to think both long and straight? And if so, might there not be argument for conceiving of defects and leaps in another light altogether, as the strains that channel and focus what talents possess? - the stutterer who becomes an orator; the idiot savant in whose compartmented ability there are wonderful lacunae; and the draws with such finesse because all colour hues for expression are blocked. We know what we do, the argument suggests, not from the of our handicaps, but on their strength to thesis, needless to say, for which this provides memorable examples.

The story of the education of the deaf, Lane depicts it, is a turbulent one, well-served by visionaries, zealots, charlatans, headed philanthropists and administrators. You enjoy a crusade against perceived vice, or simply a case robustly made, or offended by a certain theatricality of style. You are happy to wait, carried along on a tide, before allowing a colder-eyed vision to emerge. You will emerge better informed with a slice of the past vividly alive in your mind. If, on the other hand, you are a professional which to think for yourself as each page and you expect a distinguished academic more than plump for one side or the other, centuries-old debate - to move you on to ground and show how a symbolic language reached - you will find *When the Mind Hears* a struggle. I struggled, I confess, there is doubtless a place for history in the clamorously partisan. I found myself, long before the end was in sight, more and more, intellectually, more and more poised.

# Down to earth

Jack Meadows

**JOHN G. BURKE**  
*Cosmic Debris: Meteorites in history*  
 445pp. California University Press. £38.25.  
 0520 058515

Of all scientific wards, "meteor" has some claim to have the most complex history. Originally, it referred to any sudden change in the atmosphere which produced light. This connection with the atmosphere led to our present use of the word "meteorology". Such diverse phenomena as lightning flashes, the Northern lights, or the will-o'-the-wisp seen over marshes were all therefore meteors. So, up to the seventeenth century, were comets, since Aristotle had supposed them atmospheric in origin. Shooting stars were placed somewhere in the middle of this jumble. By the early nineteenth century, the nature of comets, on the one hand, and of lightning flashes on the other, was beginning to be understood, but shooting stars still retained much of their mystery. Indeed, it is only in the twentieth century that the differences between meteors, which do not reach the earth's surface, and meteorites, which do, have been firmly established.

In *Cosmic Debris* John G. Burke devotes considerable space to examining the early confusion that surrounded meteorites, and how this was resolved. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, uncertainty about them was such that the majority of contemporary scientists simply disbelieved stories of stones falling from heaven. Science had, after all, spent the century since Newton in trying to rid

the world of myths and superstitions. If pigs cannot fly, why should stones? The most famous assertion of this suspicion is attributed to Thomas Jefferson, then President of the United States. "It is easier", he allegedly said, "to believe that two Yankee professors would lie than that stones would fall from heaven." With a thoroughness that is found throughout the book, Burke examines how likely is this attribution. His verdict is: not proven - though, whatever Jefferson thought of meteorites, he was certainly prepared to believe that Yankee professors could lie.

It is easy enough to understand why contemporary scientists regarded meteorites suspiciously. Meteorite falls are sufficiently spectacular to engender any number of tall stories. Roman Catholic communities have often seen shooting stars as human souls, presumably en route from purgatory to heaven. The story is a little different in the Philippines. There, shooting stars are the souls of drunkards trying to climb to heaven, but continually falling back (singing, as they do so, "Do not drink, do not drink"). Fallen meteorites have generated equally large claims. The most famous alleged meteorite is that holy relic, the black stone of Mecca. Burke examines its credentials in detail. Some evidence - including careful observation by an Arab geologist on a pilgrimage - suggests that it is a terrestrial stone.

Once the study of meteorites had become a legitimate part of science, museums and universities began to build up their own collections, and as competition for rare fragments grew during the nineteenth century, so did prices. But the great collections depended as much on barter as on purchase. Numerical formulae were developed to determine the value of individual specimens, and so reduce hag-

Henry Huxley wrote the first elementary geography textbook, *Physiography*, which illustrated the subject from detailed studies of the familiar Thames Basin. It was a runaway success. Next, the aim was to introduce geography into Oxford and Cambridge. To this end, the Royal Geographical Society offered to subsidize lectureships and readerships but it was not until 1887 that Oxford and Cambridge accepted geographers on their staff. The Royal Geographical Society had to wait until the next century for the permanent establishment of departments and degrees in geography.

Once accepted as an academic discipline, geography again changed. Stoddart, arguing as a biologist, believes that the most important changes stemmed from evolutionary and ecological theories. Lyell and Darwin introduced time, mutability and interdependence. It was no longer enough to make a map or name a river: dynamic geological changes and theories of plant succession and vegetational climaxes became essential parts of geography. Furthermore, the influence of ecological botanists meant that geographers became interested in interrelationships: relationships between organisms and the inorganic world and man's relationship with both. According to Stoddart, it was the ecological approach that had the greatest effect on geography because the ecosystem provided a model of structural study: it was dynamic, it was self-regulatory and it was unifying.

In the last chapter, the author describes some exciting developments that have taken place recently in biogeography. Systematists and geologists are once more seeing the subject on a global scale. Picking up where Darwin and Wallace left off, they are forging biogeography out of the narrow ecological dimension and, at the same time, developing a new methodology. It is having its effect on the biologist and geologist but, in spite of what the author claims, it has not had a marked effect on the geographer. Stoddart himself has clambered over coral reefs round the world and stimulated the study of reef ecology and biogeography. But most geographers are unaware that animals - as well as plants - are part of the ecosystem.

*On Geography* is excellent on nineteenth-century geography and its proponents. It traces the evolution of geographical thought - the facts and the theories - through the characters of the men who made the subject.

Wilma George

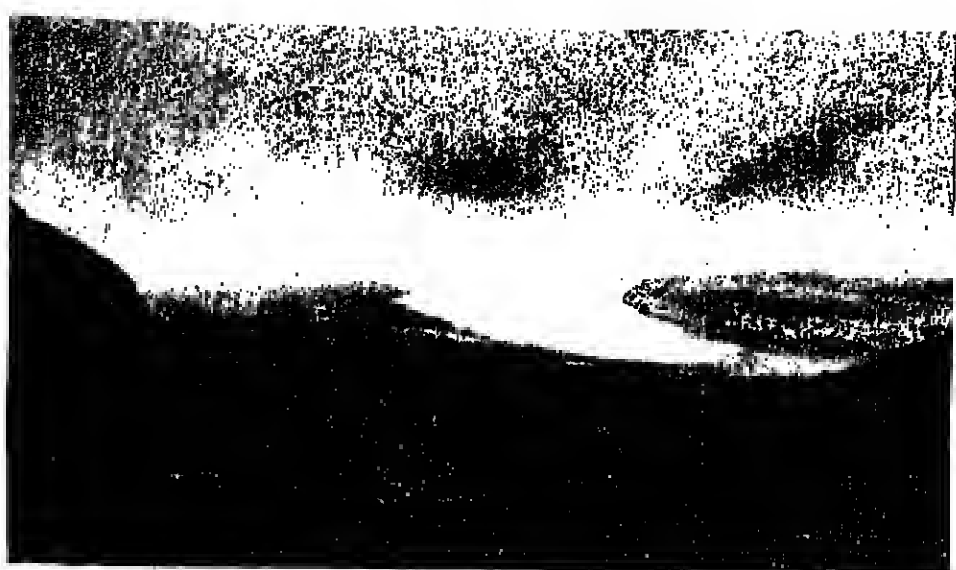
**A. STODDART**  
*On Geography*  
 445pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £22.50.  
 0191 134883

*On Geography* discusses the origins of geography and its progress in Britain through two centuries. Geography started as a descriptive subject concerned with making maps and charts, as adventurers extended their journeys into the unknown they required more reliable tools. But doesn't the academic have a responsibility? - to think both long and straight? And if so, might there not be argument for conceiving of defects and leaps in another light altogether, as the strains that channel and focus what talents possess? - the stutterer who becomes an orator; the idiot savant in whose compartmented ability there are wonderful lacunae; and the draws with such finesse because all colour hues for expression are blocked. We know what we do, the argument suggests, not from the of our handicaps, but on their strength to thesis, needless to say, for which this provides memorable examples.

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OLIVER REYNOLDS



"Loch Brittle towards Rhum, Isle of Skye" from Mist, Mountain, Water, Wind, photographs by John Davies (50pp. Travelling Light. £9.95. 0906 333 180).

gling between curators. One rival commented enviously on the vast range of specimens held by the Natural History Museum: "This is an expression of the power and influence of Great Britain in all directions of its colonial possessions."

These nineteenth-century collections have provided the basic resources for meteorite research ever since their foundation. Burke describes their development well, as he does all the history of meteorites prior to the twentieth century. Unfortunately, his account of events since 1900 and, more especially, since 1950, is much more cursory. The problems of compressing this part of the narrative are increased by the great growth of research in recent decades. Still, he amply demonstrates the continuity of several basic themes. One example is the part meteorites have played in providing hints about planetary interiors. Quite early in the nineteenth century, it was speculated that they might be fragments of an exploded planet. Though the fortunes of this idea have fluctu-

ated, the belief that studies of the earth's interior can be based on extrapolations of meteorite data has continued to flourish. Another perennial theme has been the search for what meteorites might tell us about the origins of life. For more than a century, there have been suggestions that life forms or, at least, chemical traces of life can be found in some meteorites. As late as the 1960s, uncertainties regarding the meteorite evidence helped persuade the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States to spend large sums of money on isolating rocks brought back from the moon in case they brought infection to earth.

After all these years of observation and experiment, meteorites remain enigmatic objects, and so many different scientists are involved in their study that it is often difficult to integrate their work. Dr Burke's book pulls these strands together and provides a very readable introduction to past progress in meteoritics.

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Perla, Michel. *Translated by Michael Fineberg. The Way of the Dead Indians: Quilvo myths and symbols. Austin: Texas UP, 1985pp. illus. \$30 (hardcover), \$12.95 (paperback), 0 292 79032 5 (hc), 0 292 79033 2 (pb), 1985/87.*

## Architecture

Brooks, Michael W. *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986pp. \$28. 0 8135 1205 0 (pb), 29/87.*

## Art

A Tribute to Henry Moore 1898-1986. *Marlborough Fine Art, 0 Albemarle Street, London W1X 4DP. 20pp., plates. £10 (paperback).*

Blake, William. *Colour Versions of the Book of Job Designs, limited edition. William Blake Trust, 90 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 5PY. £30.*

Blake, William. *Illustrations of the Book of Job, limited edition. William Blake Trust, £1,000.*

Babyforn, David Hogarth's Blacks: Images of blacks in 18th-century English art. *Manchester UP, 1986pp. £23 (hardcover), £10.95 (paperback), 0 7190 2310 5 (hc), 0 7190 2317 3 (pb), 23/87.*

Fried, Michael. *Realism, Writing, Olfaction: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane. Chicago UP, 215pp., illus. £23.95, 0 226 26210 5 (hc), 0 226 26211 1 (pb), 1987.*

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